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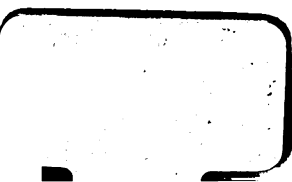
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OR,

THE CAPTAIN'S CHILDREN.

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BY

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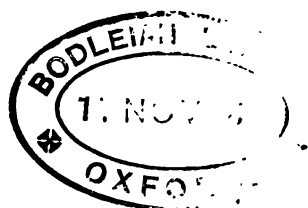
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CHAPTER I.

MAY'S NEWS.



NE wet day in spring Colin and Neil Skene were at play in the barn at Sweetwells, and a barn makes a first-rate playroom on a wet day. They were strong, bright-faced boys, with bare, brown legs for they wore kilts, as they were Scotch boys. Though their names were Colin and Neil, they were more often called Coll and Noll than anything else.

‘I say, I’m tired of this,’ said Colin; ‘I wish it would clear up.’

‘I wish something would happen,’ said Neil.

Just then a little girl, with a white cat in her arms, came running in.

'Why, May! what have you been doing all this time? We thought you were never coming, and we were just going off.'

May sat down on a heap of straw, and as soon as she was able to speak—for she had lost her breath running so fast through the rain—she said one word: 'Guess!'

'Guess!—guess what?' said Coll.

'That's what you are to find out,' said May, 'but I am quite sure you will not, not if you guess all day.'

'Well, then, you may as well let it out at once, May; it is no use to waste time.'

'Yes, tell us what it is; don't be a tease,' put in Noll.

'No, I will not tell till you have guessed three times at least.'

The boys knew that Miss May would have her own way, and, as she was a dear little thing and a great pet, they began to guess.

'Is it nice?' said Coll.

'I think so, but I'm not sure,—I *hope* so.'

'Is it for us, or for father and mother?' said Noll.

'For us all—but a great deal more for us.'

'Oh, I know!' cried Coll; 'of course, it is a pony!' But May shook her head and said 'No.'

'Is it one thing or more? Don't tell me what it is;

I *will* find out myself,' said Noll, who did not like to be beaten.

'It's two; and it's a sort of thing we have never seen before,' said May, who was now burning to tell her grand news.

The boys guessed all sorts of things: young pups, young turkeys, a new man,—but they were all wrong.

'It's a boy and a girl,' said May at last.

'A boy and a girl!—and you said we had never seen the sort of thing before. What *do* you mean, May?' said Colin.

'No more we have; it's a new kind of boy and girl. Now can't you guess?'

'A new kind of boy and girl! What do you mean, May? You must tell us all now, there's a pet.'

'It's *cousins*!' said May, at last, making the word as long as ever she could.

'Cousins! you don't mean to say that Uncle Phil is going to bring Frank and Fanny to see us? Oh, that is jolly! I am glad! I'm quite sure they will be nice if they are one bit like uncle,' cried Colin.

'Yes, Frank and Fanny are coming, and they are going to stay a long, long time,' went on May,—'a year or more; uncle has to go in his ship to some place ever so far off. He has to find out the way to somewhere; I think the Queen, or some one very grand, has told him to go; and he says he does not like to leave Frank and Fan at school for such a long

time, so they are to live with us all the while he is away. Father is going to London next week to fetch them, and mother says we must all be very kind to them; but I shan't be the only girl any more,' said May, 'and I'm not at all sure that I shall like it;' and she pulled a long face.

'Oh yes, you will, May,' said hopeful Colin; 'you see if you don't! and of course you will always be the pet. No fear; Fan may be a nice girl—I've no doubt she is—but I'm quite sure she's not up to our May; can she be, Noll?'

'I should just think not!' said Noll.

So May gave each of the boys a hug, and then they talked of all the fun they would have with their cousins from England.

The great day which was to bring the cousins came at last.

The three children had been on the look-out for the first glimpse of the dogcart for more than an hour. At last they caught sight of it a long way down the road. May ran to the house to tell her mother.

'Here they are, mother!' she cried; 'we can see them at last.'

Mrs. Skene came running out to the porch, but could see no sign of any one coming.

'They will be here in no time,' said May; 'they were at the smith's when I saw them.'

'At the smith's! then they will not be here for ten

minutes, May,' said Mrs. Skene. 'Do you think you can wait all that time?'

'I must,' said May. 'Oh, mother, what do you think Fanny will be like?'

'We shall know very soon now, my child; I have little doubt that we shall soon love her very much if she is at all like her father and her dear mother.'

'That was your sister, wasn't it?' asked May.

'Yes, dear, your aunt was my sister; she died when Fanny was quite a wee baby. So we must all try to be very, very kind to Fanny, because she has no mother of her own, poor child.'

'And we must be kind to Frank too, mustn't we?'

'Of course, my dear; they must be just like a new brother and sister to you all, and I hope you will all be very happy, good children.'

Just then the sound of wheels could be heard between the trees, which were on each side of the road that led to the house. The next minute the dogcart stopped at the door, and Coll and Noll and a stable boy all came up close behind it.

Frank and Fanny were soon helped down from their high seat by their uncle's side in the dogcart. They were tall, fair children, their hair was light, and their skin looked very white beside their cousins' healthy, sunburnt faces.

Fanny clung shyly to her uncle's side, but Frank went up to his aunt at once and said,—

‘How do you do, auntie? Are these my cousins?’

‘Yes, Frank, these are your cousins, and I am sure you will soon be fine friends,’ said Mrs. Skene. ‘And is this my niece?’ she went on, drawing the little girl to her side and giving her a kiss.

Coll and Noll and May stood in a group at first, staring at their cousins, but when their mother spoke they gained courage and came forward.

‘You are Colin, I know,—you are the tallest. Uncle has told us all about you,’ said Frank, who was not a bit shy like his sister, for he had been to a big boys’ school. ‘I say, can you play cricket?’

‘No,’ said Coll, ‘but I can do lots of other things.’

It did not take the boys many minutes to make friends, they soon found lots to say. But Fanny held fast by her aunt’s hand, and looked round her with a shy glance.

‘I am sure you must all be hungry,’ said Mrs. Skene; ‘tea will be ready very soon.’

‘I’m glad of that, aunt,’ said Frank; ‘we had a first-rate dinner at Perth, but I am ready to eat my fingers again by this time.’

‘Well, boys, take Frank to wash his hands, and, May, you take Fanny to see her room. And come down as soon as the bell rings,’ said Mrs. Skene.

So May took her cousin by the hand and led her up-stairs. But Fanny did not say one word.



"And is this my niece?" she went on, drawing the little girl to her side."



'You are to sleep in my room,' said May; 'mother thought you would like that best.'

It was a dear little room, all so fresh and pure and clean. There were two small white beds side by side. From the window was a fine view of the green hills and the blue sea.

'Is that the North Sea?' said Fanny. It was the first word she had dared to speak.

'Yes, it is the North Sea. We look straight to the North Pole, only we cannot see so far,' said May.

'I am glad of that,' said Fanny; 'for my dear old Pups is going in his ship to find the way to the North Pole. I *am* so glad we look that way.'

'Do you mean Uncle Phil?' asked May.

'I mean my father—but I call him my Pups. I don't know what I shall do without him, he is such a dear;' and the child's eyes filled with tears.

Now May had been the only girl at Sweetwells for so long that she had not been best pleased at the thought of a girl cousin coming, but when she saw the tears in Fanny's eyes she felt so sorry that she forgot all that, and put her arm round Fanny's neck.

'We all mean to love you very, very much,' she said, 'and to be very kind to you. You and Frank are to be our new brother and sister; mother says so,—and mother is just as good as Uncle Phil.'

'Pups told me so; he said I should soon love aunt,

and I think so too ; she has a dear kind face,' said Fanny, drying her eyes.

'And won't you love me too?' said May.

Fanny looked at May with her soft blue eyes for a moment or two, and then said, 'I will try.'

Fanny was an only girl as well as May, and had always been her father's great pet. And she did not know, any more than May, how she would like to live with a girl cousin. So, as she had been taught always to speak the truth, she could not say more than that she would try.

When Fanny took off her hat and brushed her hair and washed her face, May saw that she was a very pretty little girl. And not only that she was pretty, but that she had a sweet smile on her fair face. And May thought to herself that no one could help loving such a child as her new cousin.





CHAPTER II.

MAKING FRIENDS.

WHEN tea was over Mr. Skene said he thought the young folks must be so tired that they would like to go to bed at once ; but Frank said he was not one bit tired now, he had had such a good tea, and he could not go to bed till he had been outside.

‘I have never been on a farm before in all my life,’ he cried ; ‘no more has Fanny, and we do so want to see what sort of a jolly place Sweetwells is.’

‘Well, well, be off with you, then ’ said Mr. Skene.

So all the children put on their hats and went out to see round the place.

‘I think it is lovely,’ said Fanny, who had grown less shy by this time.

It was very pretty ; there was no doubt of that. The house was a cottage with a porch at the front door and windows on each side. In front of the house were flower-beds and a green lawn, and at the

back was a terrace of green grass, from which one had a fine view of the sea. All round about were trees, and there was a flower-garden on one side, with trees all round it to keep off the cold winds, and there was also a large kitchen garden. Among the grass under the trees and on the terrace were numbers of sweet spring flowers in bloom.

The children went first round the house and gardens, then they went to the stables and byres, and saw the horses and cattle get their supper.

Fanny felt a little bit afraid at so many great cattle, for she thought some of them looked fierce.

Her cousins laughed at her fears, and said that the creatures were all tied up, and could not touch her ; and that they would not hurt her anyhow, for they were all so tame.

But Frank took his sister's hand and held it fast in his ; for he was a kind brother, and then she felt quite safe.

By the time the creatures had all been fed, the English cousins were not sorry to go to bed, for they felt tired after their long journey.

There were no lessons at first after the cousins from England came to Sweetwells. The children had a whole week given them to make friends, which they did long before the week was over.

Fanny soon lost her shyness in a house where all

were so kind to her, and May found it so nice to have a little girl of her own age to play with, that she forgot all about being jealous.

As for Frank, he was at home at once, and soon made friends with all the living beings on the place, man, woman and child — horse, cow, dog, cat, or whatever else there might be. Frank was the oldest of the five children, and the rest soon learned to run after him and look upon him as a sort of hero. He was rather a tall boy for his age, with curly brown hair and merry-looking eyes that were often brimming over with mischief. He had high spirits and a very strong will of his own, and he could not bear to be thwarted. If he took it into his head to do a thing, do it he would in spite of what any one else said to him. He had not yet learned that old heads are wiser than young ones, and he had not been taught to yield, for he had no kind mother to train him, and Captain Hardy was so seldom at home, that when he had his children with him perhaps he spoilt them a little, and he could not bear to deny them anything.

Fanny was a loving, gentle little thing. She too had high spirits, and was ready to follow wherever Frank led ; for she thought there was no such boy as her brother.

Both Frank and Fanny loved their father beyond what words could say ; they thought him the best and

bravest and most clever man in the world, and indeed he was worthy of their love and pride.

There was plenty to amuse the children at Sweetwells for much longer than one week. Besides the cattle and horses and poultry, there were the mill, the barn, and the other farm buildings, and all the



fields and gardens and little woods. Then beyond the farm land there was a lovely little glen where all sorts of wild-flowers and ferns grew; a small stream ran through this glen, which always made pleasant music, and in one place the stream fell over some rocks and made a waterfall.

The glen led down to the sea-shore, where the

stream ran into the sea. The cliffs were very high by the sea, and under the cliffs there was a funny little fishing village.

It was one of the children's chief pleasures to run down the steep glen to the sea, and play on the beach, and watch the fishing-boats coming in and out.

As Captain Hardy was a sailor, he had taught his children to love the sea, and Frank knew all about boats, and could tell his cousins the name of each rope and each sail of the little fishing-boats.

When they were playing on the beach Frank and Fanny talked a great deal about their father, and told their cousins of the many strange sights he had seen on foreign seas—for he had been nearly all over the world.

But talking of her father often made little Fanny sad, and she would sit down on the beach with her chin resting in her hand, looking out at the sea, till her blue eyes would fill with tears, and sometimes the tears would roll down her cheeks; for she knew it would be a long, long time before she could see that dear father again,—a year or more, he had said when he went away.





CHAPTER III.

FANNY'S FAMILY.

AT the end of the week the boys were sent off to school at the nearest town.

Once a fortnight Mr. Skene drove in to the market, where he talked with other farmers about crops and cattle, and he brought the boys home from Friday to Monday—for Friday was market day.

Mrs. Skene taught the little girls herself; they had lessons between breakfast and dinner, except when the boys were at home; then there were no lessons for any one, for there was always so much to show and to tell that they could hardly have given their minds to their books even if they had tried.

The boys, of course, had to go all over the farm and see each beast upon it. And they had to hear all the news of the place, for on a farm there is almost always some sort of news: there has been a new calf, or a new foal, or some cow has been ill, or some horse run away, or something or other.

Then, when they had heard all the home news, they had to tell all about school, what games they had had, and what scrapes they had got into, and who was at the top of the class and was likely to get the prize, and so on, for the little girls liked to hear all that their brothers had been doing.

And besides all this seeing and hearing there were grand games to be played at, for Frank was a first-rate hand at making new games. So the time passed only too quickly when the boys came home.

Fanny and May soon grew very fond of each other. May never felt dull now when the boys were away at school, for she always had some one to learn with and to play with, and that made the time pass very quickly.

Fanny had always been fond of pets, and now she had plenty of all sorts. She and May always had a run after breakfast, and, if the weather was fine, they spent the whole afternoon out of doors.

The poultry were perhaps their greatest pets. As soon as the cocks and hens heard the children's voices, they came running up from all parts as fast as their legs could carry them, hoping for a little corn; for they always seemed hungry, though they had plenty to eat. Many of them were so tame that they would eat out of the children's hands.

One day Mrs. Skene said, 'The Cochinchina hen is wanting to sit, so, if you like, Fanny, you may put

some eggs under her, and the chickens shall be yours when they come out.'

'Oh, that will be fun!' cried Fanny, as she clapped her hands.

So Mrs. Skene gave Fanny twelve eggs in a basket, and they made a black mark on each egg to know it, and went to find the hen.

It was a large yellow hen, and she had hidden herself in a dark corner of a shed. Mrs. Skene held the hen while the children put the eggs under her.

'Will they really turn into chickens, auntie?' asked Fanny.

'Yes; the hen will sit on the eggs for three weeks to keep them warm, and then you will have some chickens of your own.'

Each morning, as soon as she was up, Fanny ran to look at her hen; and there she always found her sitting quite still in the dark corner, keeping her eggs warm. She only came off once or twice a day to get some food; but she never stayed off long enough to let the eggs get cold. Once each day she turned each egg. She was a wise hen, and knew just what she ought to do with her eggs.

'I do wonder she does not get tired of sitting there all day, it must be so dull!' said Fanny; 'I'm sure I could not sit still so long.'

'Some hens do get tired of sitting so long,' said

Mrs. Skene, 'and they leave their eggs ; but then they have no dear little chickens.'

One day, when Fanny and May went to look at the yellow hen, they found she had a friend with her. A grey hen had come and sat down close beside her. They tried to drive the grey hen away, and make her sit somewhere else, but it was no good. She would go and sit close beside the yellow hen, and they could not get her to move. And there she sat quite still all the rest of the three weeks.

At last the three weeks were ended. Fanny had a look at her hen the last thing before she went to bed, and there the poor thing sat just as grave and still as ever.

The next morning Fanny and May rose very early and ran out to the shed. They found the hens both in the old place, with the eggs beneath them.

'No chickens!' cried Fanny ; 'I don't think there will ever be any chickens.'

'Yes, there will ; they will come soon,' said May, as she took one of the eggs gently from beneath the hen and held it to her ear. 'I can hear it chirp ; you listen, Fanny, and you will hear it too.'

Fanny held her breath while May put the egg to her ear, and she could just hear a faint sound of chirp, chirp, inside the egg.

'That is the wee chicken,' said May. 'But we must leave them now, and go in to breakfast ; there is mother calling.'

The little girls ran up to Mrs. Skene, who stood in the porch calling them.

‘Oh, auntie,’ said Fanny, skipping with delight, ‘there really is a chicken inside one of my eggs! Do you think it will ever be able to get out of the shell?’

‘Yes, I think it will, Fanny; but you must come to breakfast now, and after school we will go again and look at the hens.’

‘Must I wait till after school?’ said poor Fanny, with a long face.

‘Yes, dear,’ said her aunt; ‘you must leave the eggs alone, you would only do harm by pulling them about.’

Lessons seemed very long to Fanny that day, but she tried to be a good girl, though she could not help speaking once or twice about her eggs. As soon as school was over she ran off without waiting to put away her books.

It was not such a new thing to May to see young chickens, so she made the room quite tidy, and then ran after her cousin.

Fanny was kneeling down in front of the hen. ‘Oh, May,’ she said, in a whisper, ‘I can hear such a noise! Do tell me what it is; I am afraid to touch.’

May lifted up one of the hens, and there were a number of wee chickens. Such funny little things!

Fanny screamed with delight, and danced about. ‘Oh, the dear pets!’ she cried. ‘Oh, what lots! one, two, three, four,—why, there are eight!’

'There will be some more soon,' said wise May. 'I think we had better leave them now.'

'Oh, I must take them in to show to auntie,' said Fanny.

'You must not touch them yet ; the hen will peck you,' said May.

So Fanny ran off to tell her aunt, for she had grown very fond of her kind aunt by this time.

Mrs. Skene came with Fanny to look at the chickens. 'They are nice, healthy little things,' she said. 'You must give them some food as soon as the rest are out.'

By the end of the day all the twelve chickens were hatched, and the little girls gave them some soft food. They were funny little soft things, like balls of grey wool ; they all ran about round the hens, crying, 'Chirp, chirp.'

Both the hens seemed to think the chickens were theirs. They both spread out their wings, and cried 'Cluck, cluck, cluck.' The chickens did not seem to know which was their mother. Some ran to one hen, and some ran to the other ; but most went to the yellow hen.

'Twelve chickens do not want two hens to take care of them,' said Mrs. Skene ; 'we must drive the grey hen away.'

'Run away, Mrs. Grey, run away !' cried Fanny, as she shook her skirt at the hen and tried to drive it out of the shed.

But the grey hen would not be driven away. As

soon as the children got her outside, she ran round their legs back into the shed, and spread out her wings and cried 'Cluck, cluck.'

'Mrs. Yellow must be the mother, and Mrs. Grey the nurse,' said May.

'Yes, that must be it,' said Fanny; 'my chickens are very grand, they must have a nurse.'

For a few days the chickens were kept inside the



shed, as the ground was damp. May and Fanny spent most of their play-time watching their new pets. It was very funny to see the two hens. As soon as Mrs. Yellow sat down and spread out her wide wings, Mrs. Grey did the same close by her side, and cried 'Cluck, cluck, cluck,' with all her might. But if Mrs. Yellow only said 'Cluck, cluck' in quite a low tone, the chickens nearly all ran to her in spite of Mrs. Grey's loud call.

Poor Mrs. Grey looked quite sad, and called to the chicks till she was hoarse, but in vain ; she never could get more than two or three at the outside to take shelter under her warm, soft wings. They liked best all to crowd close under Mrs. Yellow, and yet her wings were no warmer or no softer than poor Grey's.

When the chickens were a few days old, the sun shone out so warm and bright that Mrs. Skene said she thought they might safely be let out for a run. So Fanny set the door of the shed wide open, and out walked Mrs. Yellow, with a slow, stately step, lifting her claws very high as she went ; close behind her ran all the twelve young chickens, and behind them came Mrs. Grey.

They all seemed to enjoy being out of doors very much. The two mother hens scraped the ground with their feet and called 'Cluck, cluck,' and all the chicks ran round them and pecked at the earth. Then, when they were tired of running and scraping, Mrs. Yellow chose a warm, sunny spot in front of a shrub that kept off all the wind, and sat down and spread out her wide wings, and gave a gentle little call, and all the young chicks ran to her as fast as their little legs could run, and nestled under her wings. Mrs. Grey went on scraping for a minute or two, and tried to keep the chicks with her ; but it was no use, they all ran off to Mrs. Yellow. So then Mrs. Grey sat down too, and called very loud, 'Cluck, cluck,

cluck,' but only two chickens came to her, and she had to be content.

From that day the chickens, with their two hens, always went out unless it was very wet. They grew fast, and soon their little wings began to show, and after that their tails.

At first they were afraid of Fanny and May, and as soon as they saw the children they ran up to the hens and hid beneath their wings; but as they grew older the chickens saw that the little girls were their friends, and would not hurt them, but gave them nice food to eat; and as soon as the children's voices were to be heard, the chickens would run to them and cry, 'Chirp, chirp, chirp,' and it was very seldom that they did not get a little corn. They soon became so tame that they would jump into Fanny's lap and eat out of her hand.

I do not know why the chickens did not care for Mrs. Grey, for she was just as kind a mother as Mrs. Yellow; it may have been that her wings were not quite so soft and warm inside as Mrs. Yellow's; but for some reason or other poor Mrs. Grey never could get them to love her and follow her as they did Mrs. Yellow; though, if anything made them afraid, and she was near, they would run to her fast enough.

When the maid went out to feed the poultry at morning and night, she used to call them so loud that they could hear her all over the place, and came

running from all parts, for somehow poultry are always hungry. The cocks came first, and they called the hens, and the hens called the chickens.

The mother hens were so kind that they would not eat themselves till their chickens had had enough. They stood by the chickens and drove off the big cocks and hens that came in the way; for the big ones would have trodden on the little chickens and killed them, if their mother had not taken care of them, they were all so eager to get as much food as they could. When they had had their supper, they all went to roost for the night, for the rule of the poultry-yard was—

‘Early to bed and early to rise.’

In time Fanny's chickens became so big that there was not room for them all under the wings of Mrs. Yellow; still, very few of them would go to Mrs. Grey, though she did seem to say with her sad voice, ‘Why don't you come to me? I have lots of room for you.’ No; they would rather crowd and crush each other under Mrs. Yellow, who spread her wings so wide that I think she *must* have hurt herself. But she did not seem to mind that. The more the chickens crowded under her, the better pleased she looked, and she made a soft, happy sound to herself, while poor Mrs. Grey's voice and face grew more sad.

After some weeks the chickens became so big that

they could manage for themselves, and did not need any longer to be kept warm by their mother's wings, or be fought for at feeding time. They were big and strong enough to fight for themselves, and their feathers had grown thick enough to keep them warm. So, instead of sleeping in the shed with the mother hens, they went to the large poultry-house at night, and jumped on to the perches just like grown-up fowls.

As soon as the chickens went away by themselves at night like this the mother hens did not care for them any more, and in a few days they would fight with their own chickens over the food, just as they would with any other fowls. Indeed, I believe they quite forgot that they ever had been their own chickens at all.





CHAPTER IV.

THE LION-SLAYER.

WELL, and what shall we play at?' said Frank, as he sat on a gate swinging his legs, while the other children stood round about him.

The boys had come home from school the night before; they had spent all the morning going about the farm, and now there was a long afternoon for play.

'Shall we have hare-and-hounds?' said Colin.

'Or Puss-in-the-corner?' asked May.

'Oh no; those old games are so slow,' said Frank. 'Let's pretend we are some one else; there's no fun in being ourselves,—we are always ourselves, you know.'

'Oh yes,' chimed in Fanny; 'it's much better fun to be some one else. Frank and I always pretend we are some one else.'

'How do you do it?' asked Colin.

‘Why, we are some great man, some one who has been somewhere and found out some country, or something of that sort, like Drake the sailor, you know, or Speke and Grant, or some one of that sort. Sometimes we pretend to be papa.’

‘Well, shall we do that to-day?’ asked Neil, who felt rather puzzled at this new sort of game.

Frank thought a little, then he said, ‘Suppose we are that fellow that killed the lions; what’s his name, Fanny?—the lion-slayer, you know.’

‘Gordon Cumming?’ said Fanny.

‘Yes, Gordon Cumming; we can pretend at being him much better here than we could at home.’

‘But we can’t *all* be Gordon Cumming,’ said Colin.

‘Oh no,’ put in Fanny; ‘Frank’s always Gordon Cumming himself.’

‘Well, and what are we to be?’ said Colin.

‘You be my friend, Colin. I don’t think Gordon Cumming had a friend with him, though, so you must be my faithful servant. Those chaps that knock about the world always take a faithful servant with them, and the servants have just as much fun as the masters.’

‘And what shall I be?’ asked Neil.

‘Well, you and the girls must sometimes be friendly natives; and sometimes you must be lions and be slain, you know; that’s the fun of the game—slaying the lions. Fanny makes a first-rate lion, only

she can't roar quite loud enough to make the forest ring.'

'I'll roar loud enough,' cried Neil ; 'will this do ?' and he made a most fearful noise.

'Yes, that's just the thing. Now suppose we start. We must have guns, or bows and arrows, and knapsacks, Colin,' said Frank.

'We've got some bows and arrows in the house,' said Colin.

'While they are getting their luggage ready we had better begin to be natives,' said Fanny, who had often played at the game before, and was quite up to it. 'Come along down the glen, and hide ourselves ; it is a sort of hide-and-seek game, you know.'

So Fanny and May and Neil ran down the glen till they found a little hollow under a bank, which Fanny said would do for a hut. They waited there till they heard voices coming near.

'Now,' said Fanny, 'we must crouch under the bank for fear, as soon as we see them coming ; the natives are always afraid of white men, you know. And then, when we see they don't mean to harm us, we must offer them salt, and after that we are bound to be friends and help them all we can.'

Fanny had just said this, when they saw Frank's head appear above a bush.

He drew back at sight of them, and said, in a very grand tone of voice, 'My faithful Colin, what is that

I see in yonder rude clay hut? None other than a native chief, with his unlovely squaws seated beside him. Think you, my Colin, will they do us harm?’

‘No, sir,’ blurted out Colin, who was not yet up to the game.

‘Let us approach and test them,’ said Frank, and he walked boldly up to the door of the hut, and lifted the bow and arrows which were slung to his side.

Upon this Fanny ran forward and threw herself upon the ground at Frank’s feet, crying, ‘Wa-wa-wa-boobly-gar.’

‘Gubble, gubble-boobly-gar,’ said Frank; and he turned to Colin and said, ‘You see how nice it is I know a little of the native tongue; this black-haired squaw craves our good-will, and I have told her not to fear, the white man will not harm her.’

Then he pointed to Fanny with the tip of an arrow, and said, ‘Queebly qum—arise, thou woman of the ebon skin.’

Upon this Fanny bent her head even lower, and kissed his feet, and told Neil and May they must do the same. Then she took up a pinch of dust which she held towards Colin. ‘This is salt, you know,’ she said as she did so.

Colin took a few grains of dust and put them to his lips.

Upon that Fanny began to dance about and to sing some words that had no sense.

‘You must dance and sing too,’ she said to her fellow-natives, ‘for the white man has eaten our salt, and he cannot harm us now.’

When the dance was over Frank said, ‘Now, friendly natives, will you of your goodness prepare a feast for the homeless and hungry white man? and then we will all sleep till sunset, and at sunset we will sally forth to shoot the lordly lion, the king of the forest.’

So Frank and Colin sat down, while the others plucked some leaves and picked up some stones, with which they made believe to make a feast.

When the feast was done they all stretched themselves at full length on the ground, and soon Frank began to snore.

As soon as Frank began to snore, Fanny jumped to her feet and said, ‘Now they will sleep till sunset, and we must be lions. The lions always come down to the pools at sunset to drink, so we must find a pool, and then they will try to shoot us, and we must run away. Whoever gets caught is shot, and whoever gets home without being caught escapes; that’s the best part of the game; we must dodge about and double, and make them run as far round as we can, and if a lion can get behind a man and spring upon him, then the man is killed. Do you think you will know how to play now?’

'Oh yes, quite well,' said both May and Neil.

'Now we must find a pool to drink, but we must not let them see where it is. Where shall we go?'

They hunted about a little while, and Neil said he thought they had better go to the foot of the waterfall, where there was a pool.

So they scrambled down to this pool, and then



they made themselves into lions by kneeling on all fours, ready for the hunters.

'As soon as they come we must begin to lap the water,' said Fanny; 'but we must not move till they fire the first shot, then we must all roar very loud and run away. It really is lovely playing at it here with real water and rocks and trees; at home we had to make believe with chairs and tables, and we tie hairy ugs round us to make us into lions.'

The others had got quite into the spirit of the game by this time, and thought it *lovely* too.

They had not been long at the pool before they heard a slight rustling in the bushes above them, and they all began to roar with all their might ; then came a sudden *crack, crack*, and the lions roared louder than ever. In a moment Frank sprang upon a rock almost close to them.

‘Now, quick, or they’ll catch us!’ said Fanny, and off she flew on the other side of the stream as fast as her feet could carry her along such a rough road.

A fine scramble the lions had, up and down, between rocks, and behind bushes. The hunters made a hot pursuit, but they would not have slain even one lion, if May had not slipped her foot and fallen upon her knees for a moment—it was only a moment, but it lost her her life. Frank came pouncing down upon her, and killed her with a grand flourish.

‘Now you must fall down and die,’ he said.

‘And what must I do then?’ asked May.

‘When you are dead? Why, I ought to carry you home on my back, but I’m afraid I can’t manage that ; if you like you can be a friendly native again, and carry my bow and arrows for me.’

It was really sunset before the hunt ended, and the children came home tired, dirty, and torn, but as merry and hungry as children could be.

‘ Oh, papa, we have had such a jolly game !’ shouted Colin, as he rushed into the house after his father. ‘ We’ve been Gordon Cumming the lion-slayer. Oh, it’s such fun hunting lions !’

And while they had tea the children gave a graphic account of their lion hunt.





CHAPTER V.

THE LARK'S NEST.

ONE day Mr. Skene said, 'I am going round the land to have a look at things. You may come with me if you like, lassies.'

So Fanny and May ran for their hats and went one on each side of Mr. Skene.

'May I bring Tis with me?' said May.

'Not to-day; I have something to show you that I do not wish Tis to see,' said Mr. Skene.

So Tis had to be shut in-doors, or she would have run after them. Tis was May's pet cat.

First they looked at the corn, which had just begun to show above the ground. The little girls had seen the seed put into the bare ground only a short time before, and now the fields were green.

Then they looked at the cattle all eating away in the long thick grass. Most of the beasts were quite tame, and came up to be patted as soon as they saw Mr. Skene and the children.

At first Fanny was afraid of the cattle, and caught fast by her uncle's hand when they came so near. But when she saw May stroke their noses, and that they stood quite still and did not try to hurt her, she took courage, and gave one a timid pat too. You see no one at Sweetwells ever hurt these poor beasts, or was unkind to them in any way, and that made them all so tame.

When they had looked at all the cattle they went on to the next field.

'Now I will show you my secret,' said Mr. Skene. And he walked along slowly, looking at the ground.

At last he came to a white stone.

'Now do not speak or make any noise,' he said, 'but look.'

Then he knelt down on the ground and very gently moved some tall grass aside, and there was a little nest with three tiny birds in it.

'Oh, they are young larks!' said May, in a whisper.

And that moment they could hear a lark singing overhead in the clear blue sky.

The birds were very small, and had no feathers yet; they were brown, just the colour of the earth, so that unless you looked quite close you would not notice them.

Mr. Skene made a chirping sound, and all the three little birds opened their yellow bills quite wide.

‘Now let us watch,’ said he, ‘and see what will happen.’

They sat quite still on the grass for some time, and at last the mother lark came flying down to the nest. At once the three yellow bills were wide open ; she dropped some food into each, and then flew away to find more.



‘What sweet little things they are!’ said Fanny. ‘We will come to look at them very often, won’t we, May?’

‘No, you must not come too often, my dears, or you will frighten the mother bird, and she will forsake them ; you must promise not to come near them, except when I bring you,’ said Mr. Skene. ‘I have

told the men not to put any of the cattle in this field till the young birds are fledged and can fly away.'

'What is fledged, uncle?' asked Fanny.

'Till their feathers have grown and their wings are strong enough to fly.'

'And why won't you let the cattle come into the field till they can fly?'

'For fear they should tread upon the nest and kill the young birds, and that would make me sorry, for I like to hear the larks singing in the sky all day long.'

'So do I, uncle,' said Fanny; 'it makes me feel glad.' And she began to sing and skip about.

Each day Mr. Skene took the little girls with him to have a look at the young larks in their lowly nest. Their feathers and wings soon began to grow.

'I wish they would be quick and fly away,' said one of the men; 'the grass is so long and thick in that field I shall be glad to see the beasts turned into it.'

'You will not have to wait much longer, John,' said Mr. Skene; 'the young birds will be off in a day or two now.'

And Mr. Skene was right. Two days after that they went to look at the birds, but they were gone! The tiny nest was empty.

'Oh, uncle,' cried Fanny, 'where are they gone?'

'Flown away, little Fanny.'

‘And won’t they come back again?’

‘No, they do not want the nest any longer now. They can fly about and find food for themselves.’

‘And shall we never see them any more?’

‘We shall hear them singing, dear child, and that will be better.’

As they were coming back to the house they met Alec the grieve, and Mr. Skene said, ‘You may turn the beasts into the end field now, Alec; the birds have flown.’





CHAPTER VI.

MAY'S PET.



THE greatest pet that May had was her little white cat. Its name was Tis, and it was such a tame cat that no child could help loving it. It ran after her wherever she went, just like a dog. It would go all round the farm with her and Fanny. At meal-times Tis liked to sit on the corner of May's chair, and when she had done eating herself, May let Tis eat some scraps out of her plate.

Tis was very fond of Mr. Skene as well as of May, and would follow him quite a long way on the road, and when he sat down in his great arm-chair to rest, there was nothing Tis liked more than to climb on to his shoulder or sit on his knee and lick his beard.

Mr. Skene did not care for having his beard washed by Tis, and drove her off, but as fast as he drove her away up she sprang again, and began washing and licking as fast as ever, with her little red tongue. You see Tis was a cat that liked to have her own way.

One morning Tis did not come in to get her breakfast. May ran to the door to call her, but no Tis came.

After school, as it was a wet day, Fanny and May went to play in the barn among the hay ; and there, in a corner, on a nice soft bed of hay, they found Tis.

'Oh, you darling!' cried May ; 'so there you are ! you know how to take care of yourself on a wet day. But why did not you come in to get your breakfast?'

Tis looked at May with very round eyes and said, 'Miew, miew,' but she did not jump into her young mistress's arms, as her custom was.

So May stooped down and lifted up her pet, and there she found the smallest little kitten in the world.

May and Fanny were full of delight at the sight of this new pet. They called it a dear and a love. May took the kitten into her lap to look at all its beauties, but Tis sprang after it, and caught it with her mouth by the back of its neck, and put it back on the bed of hay.

'Oh, we must show it to auntie,' said Fanny ; 'I'm sure auntie will love it.'

'Yes, we must show it to mother,' said May.

So Fanny took the cat in her arms, and May took the wee kitten in her apron, and they ran through the rain to the house.

'Oh, mother dear, do come quick! we have such a lovely thing to show you!' cried May.

'Well, what is this lovely thing?' asked Mrs. Skene, with a pleasant laugh. 'I almost think I can guess.'

'Oh, do try to guess, auntie!' said Fanny.

'It's not a dog, is it?'

'No, no!' shouted the children.

'Is it a cat?'

'Not quite a cat.'

'A kitten?'

'Yes, a darling wee pet of a kitten.'

Mrs. Skene looked at the kitten, and then told the children to take it back to the barn, and put a plate of sop beside Tis.

Poor Tis did not at all like having her kitten taken away from her. She kept crying, 'Miew, miew,' in a dismal tone; and the little kitten turned its head about in a helpless way, for it was quite blind, and every now and then gave a squeak.

When Tis was put back to her bed, and had her kitten all safe beside her once more, she began to purr with all her might, and she seemed very proud of her baby kitten.

For some days Tis would not leave her kitten at all, and at first she did not like any one to touch it ; but she soon learned that May and Fanny would not hurt it, so, in time, she let them take it up in their arms and stroke and kiss it without even saying 'Miew.'

One night May and Fanny were going round the fields with Mr. Skene to look at all the cattle, when Tis came running after them in her old way. She ran up and down, and seemed quite glad to be out in the fields once more.

'Go home, go home, Tis,' said Fanny ; 'what will poor little kit do without you ?'

But Tis would not go home. She wanted a walk as well as the little girls.

The next day Tis came in to breakfast, and took her old place on the corner of May's chair. After breakfast the children went out to have a look at the kitten, but it was gone. They hunted all over the barn, but the kitten was not there. They searched in every place they could think of, but the kitten was nowhere to be found. At last they made up their minds that the kitten was lost, and poor May was ready to cry. There were some weasels or ferrets about, who sometimes stole a chicken, and as there was not the least trace of the kitten left, they made sure that it must have been eaten by one of these creatures.

May thought that Tis must feel very sad at having

lost her kitten, so she petted her more than ever, and would take the cat with her wherever she went.

The poor cat did not seem happy, and kept on mewling all day, and when she was shut up in a room she always sat close to the door, and ran out as soon as any one came in or out.

‘Poor thing, she is fretting about her kitten,’ said May.

And all thought the same,—that Tis could not get over the loss of her kitten, for she was always running up-stairs as though in search of it.

It was nearly a week since the kitten had been lost, when Mrs. Skene sent May to the spare bedroom to get something out of one of the drawers.

The spare bed had not been slept in for some time, as no friend had been staying lately at Sweetwells.

May was just going to open the drawer when she was startled by hearing a strange little noise. She stood still to listen, and it came again.

May was but a little girl, and it was such a strange sound that it made her almost afraid.

Fanny was in their own room on the other side of the passage, so May called, ‘Fanny, Fanny, do come here! there is such a funny noise in this room!’

Fanny came at once, and the two children stood still to listen. In a minute there came a faint sound of squeak, squeak.

‘Oh, May, what can it be?’ said Fanny, in a whisper. ‘I will run and call auntie.’

'Wait a minute,—it seems to come from the bed,' said May.

So they waited for a minute or two, and then they saw the cover of the bed begin to move.

'There is something moving in the bed,' said Fanny, in a whisper.

Whatever the thing was, it was very small and moved very slowly.

'I will look,' said Fanny, and she went on tip-toe to the bedside and lifted up the cover, and there, what did she see but the lost kitten.

'Oh, the sly old Tis!' cried May; 'why, she must have had the kitten hidden here all the time.'

At that moment a 'miew' came at the door, and in walked Tis. She jumped into the bed, and put her paws round the kitten, and began to lick it all over and purr very loud. Then she looked at May and Fanny, and said, 'Miew, miew,' as much as to say, 'See, I have cheated you all; I knew where my kitten was all the time.'

The children ran down-stairs to tell Mrs. Skene what they had found, and she came with them to look at the lost kitten.

'We cannot let it stay here,' she said; 'Tis has made the bed in quite a mess with her dirty feet.'

So she found a box, and made a soft bed of wadding, and laid the kitten in that, and the children put it in the schoolroom.

Tis was quite content with this new bed for her kitten. She sat in the box most of the day, as happy as a cat could be, now she had her kitten and her mistress too.

When the maid came in to call the little girls in the morning, Tis often ran in after her and jumped into May's bed. She used to wait on the mat outside the door till Jean, the maid, came to open it.

One morning, when Jean came, she found Tis and her kitten both on the mat. Tis had brought the poor kitten all the way up-stairs, and she jumped with it in her mouth on to May's bed. The kitten was getting so fat by this time that Tis could hardly lift it, for she was but a small cat herself.

That night, when the children went to bed, they took the cat's box up with them, and put it in the corner of the room.

Tis seemed to be fast asleep when they got into bed, but in a little while they heard her scrambling out of the box and running across the floor, and then give a jump to get on to May's bed. As she jumped, they heard something fall thump on to the floor. It was the poor little kitten. Tis had it in her mouth and had let it fall as she was jumping. But Tis was not going to be beaten; back she went and picked up the kitten, and this time she jumped with it safely in her mouth and laid it on the pillow beside May, and then she began her song of purr, purr, purr.

But May could not sleep with such a loud song going on close at her ear, so she had to get out of bed and put the cat and kitten back into the box, and she did not bring them into her bedroom again at night.

Tis soon found that May was just as kind to her baby kitten as she was herself, so, when she grew tired of sitting with it in the box, and wanted to run outside and give her legs a stretch, she used to carry the kitten to May, and sit on the floor in front of her, saying, 'Miew, miew.' May knew quite well that pussy meant to say, 'Please, May, will you take care of my kitten while I go for a run?' So May used to lift the wee kitten into her lap, and put it into the pocket of her apron, and there it would lie quite still and fast asleep till its mother came back.

'We must give the kitten a name,' said May one day. 'What shall we call it, mamma?'

'You and Fanny must choose a name,' said Mrs. Skene; 'and I think it should be Fanny's cat, don't you, May?'

'Yes, mamma; I will run and fetch Fanny, and tell her that it is to be her kitten, and that she must choose a name for it herself.'

Off ran May with her two cats in her arms, and soon she found her cousin reading a story-book in the schoolroom.

'Look here, Fanny!' cried May; 'I am going to

give the kitten to you, to be your own cat, and you are to give it a name.'

Fanny was quite pleased with May's present, and took the little kitten into her arms, and stroked and kissed it.

After talking over the matter for a long time, the little girls settled that the kitten should be called Peter Piper, and Fanny found a bit of blue ribbon, which she tied round Peter's neck. She thought blue was the colour to suit him best, because his coat was yellow and white.

Master Peter Piper soon became as great a pet as Mistress Tis herself, and when he grew big enough he used to follow the little girls about just as Tis did.

Tis was very fond of her son Peter, and taught him all she knew herself. I am sorry to say that some of the things she taught him to do were very naughty things.

Now, I must tell you that, though Tis was a good, nice cat in most ways, she was a great thief. She had often and often had a good beating from the cook for stealing food from the larder, but all the beating had not made her honest, it had only taught her to be sly. Tis must have had a very quick nose, for she could smell anything nice to eat even through a closed door, and she would wait in a dark corner for ever so long watching, and as soon as she saw the



"Fanny was quite pleased with May's present, and took the little kitten into her arms."

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door open she would run in to see what she could find, and she taught her son to do the same. Most cats are very fond of cream and butter, and so was Tis.

Now, sometimes there was no one in the room when Jean laid the table for breakfast or tea, and she would go away and leave the two cats fast asleep on the rug before the fire. At least, they seemed to be fast asleep, but often it was only one of Tis's sly tricks. The moment Jean's back was turned, she would say to Peter, in cat language, 'Come, my son, follow me.'

Then she would jump on to a chair, and from the chair on to the table, and begin to lap cream out of the jug as fast as her little red tongue could go. And you may be sure that Peter soon learned to do the same. Then, if she heard any one coming, Tis would seize a ball of butter in her mouth, and jump back to her place before the fire, and look as sleepy as though she had not stirred for an hour.

Besides teaching Peter to steal, Tis taught him to catch mice and poor little dickey-birds. She ran up the tree first, and called to Peter to follow her ; and he soon learned to climb the trees as well as his mother, and to sit on a branch watching the little birds hopping about, till one came near enough for him to spring at, and catch with his cruel claws.

One day Fanny came running in to her aunt with very red cheeks and very angry eyes full of tears.

‘Why, Fanny, what is the matter?’ asked Mrs. Skene.

‘It is that nasty, horrid Peter!’ cried Fanny; ‘I shall never, never love him again!’

‘What has he done?’ asked her aunt.

‘He has killed the dear darling little robin red-breast, that sang so sweetly, and was so tame.’

‘Killed the poor little robin! I *am* sorry for that,’ said Mrs. Skene.

At that moment Peter himself came into the room, licking his lips after his feast on poor cock robin. When he saw Fanny, he began to rub his head against her legs, to show her how fond he was of her.

‘Go away, you cruel, wicked cat!’ cried Fanny; ‘don’t come near me; you shan’t be my cat any more.’ And she drove him out of the room.

Peter ran away, feeling very much puzzled; he did not know why his young mistress was so angry with him, for he had not been stealing anything off the table or out of the larder. He knew quite well that it was naughty to steal, but he had not learned that it was naughty to catch birds.

‘It seems very cruel to us to catch the pretty harmless little birds,’ said Mrs. Skene; ‘but, you see,

Fanny dear, it is a cat's nature, and I don't suppose it is any more cruel of a cat to catch a bird, than it is to catch a mouse.'

'But the birds are so pretty, and they do sing so sweetly,' said Fanny.

'Yes, my dear, I know they do, and I am very sorry the poor little robin is dead; but I do not suppose cats have eyes to see their beauty, or ears to hear the sweetness of their songs. They look upon birds and mice as their proper food, and catch them with no more wish to be cruel than the cocks and hens have when they pick up the worms, or than the butcher has when he kills a sheep for our dinner.'

This was a new thought to Fanny, and she said she would try to forgive Peter.

'But I don't feel as though I *could* love him again so much as I did,' she said. And it was some days before the kitten was quite taken into favour again. Indeed, if Fanny had not got a fright about him, I don't know that he would ever have been such a pet again.

One morning, when Jean came to call the little girls, Tis came running in at her heels, as her custom was, and sprang upon May's bed and began her morning song of 'purr, purr, purr,' but no Peter came after her.

'I suppose, as it is a cold morning, he is keeping

himself warm by the fire,' said Fanny. 'I never knew such a cat for fires.'

But there was no Peter by the fire, and, in fact, no Peter to be seen all day.

In vain Fanny ran into every room, and then all round outside the house, calling 'Pete, Pete!' he never came.

Then she and May went to look in the byres, for the cats were rather fond of finding a soft bed of straw in the byres. And then, when the maids came to milk the cows, they often got a drop of warm new milk, which was a treat.

But there was no Peter in the byres.

'Have you seen the kitten?' asked May of the stable-boy.

'Oh yes, I saw him last night run off down the glen with a lot of strange cats,' said the boy.

Now there were a number of strange wild cats living in the glen, and sometimes they came up to Sweetwells to see if they could find anything worth catching there, or to have a fight with Tis, for Tis would not make friends with these wild cats.

'Well, I did not think Peter would run away with the wild cats,' said Fanny; 'he was so tame, and seemed so fond of me.'

No one was willing to believe that Peter would do such a thing, but, as he did not appear all day or all

night, at last they all made up their minds that the boy must be right.

'And how cold poor Peter will be out there all night in the open air, with no warm bed and no supper,' said Fanny, when she saw Tis curl herself up on her warm fluffy mat for the night ; and Fanny had such a soft heart that she felt almost ready to cry, as she thought of her little pet out in the wind and rain, for it was a stormy night.

The next day, when the little girls went up to their room to make themselves tidy for dinner, they thought they heard a faint sound of 'miew, miew.'

'I do believe that is Peter's voice,' said Fanny, in a joyful tone.

They both stood still to listen, and the sound came again : a very faint 'miew,' as if the cat were in distress.

They looked under the bed, and in all the drawers and cupboards. They hunted in every hole and corner, but could see no sign of Peter, though the faint miewing did not cease.

While they were in the midst of their search, the dinner-bell rang, and neither of the children were ready ; so they had to run down just as they were, with rough heads and not very clean hands, for Mr. Skene did not like to be kept waiting for his dinner.

'Why, children, what have you been doing with

yourselves up-stairs?’ said Mrs. Skene; ‘I am sure you went up in plenty of time to dress.’

‘Yes, auntie,’ said Fanny; ‘but we heard Peter squeaking, and we have been looking for him. I am so afraid he will die before I find him! I wish I might go on hunting for him, instead of eating my dinner.’

‘No, you go on with your dinner, Fanny; Jean may go up and see if she can find him; we will wait on ourselves.’

Jean went up and stayed a good while, but at last she came down to say she could not find Peter anywhere, and that he had left off crying, so she did not know where to look. So she cleared away the meat, and brought up the pudding, which the children ate in a great hurry, and then ran off to renew their search for lost Peter.

In a minute or two Mrs. Skene joined them.

‘Stand still and listen,’ she said.

They did so, but could hear no sound.

‘Now you call him, Fanny; he knows your voice best,’ said Mrs. Skene.

So Fanny cried, ‘Pete, Pete!’

In a moment came a faint little squeak.

‘The sound comes from the drying-loft,’ said Mrs. Skene.

So they all went into the drying-loft, which was a long room with a skylight at each end, where the clothes were hung to dry in wet weather. There were

some cupboards in it, and a good many trunks and boxes round the walls.

'Now call again,' said Mrs. Skene.

Again Fanny called, 'Pete, Pete!'

And again came the little cry, 'Miew, miew.'

'It comes from that corner,' said Mrs. Skene.

The children ran to the corner, and began pulling down some rolls of carpet and floorcloth. While they were pulling the things about in a great hurry, Mrs. Skene went up to a large trunk and lifted the lid—and out jumped Peter!

Oh, how glad the poor little cat was to be let out of his dark prison, and how glad Fanny was to have her pet in her arms once more. She ran down-stairs, holding him very tight, for fear he should escape again, and begged some bits of meat and a little good cream of Betty the cook. And then she put him down before the schoolroom fire to have a good meal after his long fast of two days.

'However could he have got into that great box, and shut down the heavy lid?' said May.

'Why, miss,' said Jean, 'he must have come up after me the other day when I went to the box to get out some curtains. You know how he does follow one about. I mind that I went up and took the curtains out of the box before it was quite light, for I wanted to hang them up before breakfast; and I did not see the cat, you see, miss, for I was in a great

hurry. But, now I come to think of it, I do believe he was lying on the mat outside your door as I passed it on my way to the loft.'

After that Peter became a greater pet than ever, and he never showed the least wish to run away with wild cats and live in the glen.





CHAPTER VII.

JOCK THE WHITE TURKEY.

PLEASE, ma'am,' said Jean one day, 'here's Jim Gaul come with a white turkey; he says you told him you would buy it because it is one he brought up himself.'

'So I did,' said Mrs. Skene. 'Jim is a good boy and tries to help his mother; he makes enough money with his chickens to buy his own clothes. Come, children, let us go and see what the turkey is like.'

So May and Fanny went with Mrs. Skene to the kitchen, where they found a fair-headed freckled boy standing with a white turkey under his arm.

'Well, Jim, so you have brought me a turkey?' said Mrs. Skene.

'Yes,' said Jim, without moving. He was a good, honest boy, but he had not learned to be very polite. 'You said you'd buy it.'

'So I did,' said Mrs. Skene. 'Let me see what sort of a bird it is.'

'It's a fine bird; I bet you haven't the like at Sweetwells,' said Jim, as he put the turkey on the floor.

But, as the bird's legs were tied to each other, the poor thing of course could not stand, and it fell down flat on its side with a loud scream of 'Gobble, gobble.'

'And what is the price of the bird?' asked Mrs. Skene.



'Sevenpence the pound is the price in the town,' said Jim.

'If you sell him by the pound we had better weigh him,' said Mrs. Skene.

With some trouble the turkey was put into the scales, but he struggled so that it was no easy matter to weigh him.

He weighs twelve pounds as near as we can tell,'

said Mrs. Skene; 'so the price would be seven shillings.'

Jim spent about five minutes counting on his fingers, and then said, 'Yes—seven shillings.'

'Well, then, I will give you eight, as you are a good son to your mother,' said Mrs. Skene.

Jim took the eight shillings without a word, and was going off, but Mrs. Skene stopped him and told the servants to give him a basin of hot soup and something to eat, and she had the turkey put into the fowl-house, where it seemed very glad to have the string taken off its legs and be able to run about once more. It spread out its round tail, which was just like a fan, and stuck up all its feathers, and strutted up and down, calling out 'Gobble, gobble, gobble,' as loud as it could cry.

'Oh, mother dear, what a lovely turkey!' said May 'You will not have it killed, will you?—I did so want a white turkey!'

'Well, May, as it is so very white, I think we must keep it,' said Mrs. Skene; 'it really would be a shame to kill it. And, besides, it is not at all fat; I daresay Jim Gaul could not afford to give it much to eat.'

'We will call it Jock,' said May; 'don't you think Jock is the best name for a turkey, mother?'

'I think it is a very good name, dear,' said Mrs. Skene. So that was settled.

Master Jock grew very fast on the good food at Sweetwells, and soon he was quite the show of the poultry yard. His body and tail were quite white, without one spot on them, his head was red, and his long neck was a kind of pale bluey-pink when he was quiet ; but when he got angry his whole head and neck turned bright scarlet, and Jock was very often angry, for he had not at all a sweet temper.

The boys were very fond of teasing him ; they ran after him calling, 'Hiss, hiss,' and that always made him in a rage. He would fly after them, crying, 'Gobble, gobble, gobble,' stretching out his long red neck, and trying to peck their backs and legs. As soon as he saw the boys his neck turned scarlet, and he flew at them ; but he never flew at Fanny and May ; instead of that, when they came out, he spread out his round tail, and set up all his feathers, and strutted up and down before them, making a funny hissing noise, and looking as proud as he could. 'Issss—issss—issss,' he said, which meant, 'Do pray admire me ; am I not a fine bird ?' And he was so tame with them that he would pick the grains of corn out of the palms of their hands. He was not tame with any one but Mrs. Skene and the two little girls ; he was so fierce to all strangers that the children that came up from the village with fish were quite afraid when they saw him, and always ran away from him.

I think that made him worse, for he always flew at any one that was afraid of him.

In time Jock had grown so big and strong that he began to fight all the cocks and hens ; and, as he was so much bigger than they, he often hurt them very much.

‘This will never do,’ said Mrs. Skene one day, when the cook showed her a poor cock, whose eye Jock had pecked out ; ‘we must not let Jock go on like this.’

‘I think, ma’am, if you got him a wife he would not be so cruel to the other birds,’ said the cook.

‘I think you are right, Betty,’ said Mrs. Skene ; ‘if he had a wife of his own, perhaps he would be more happy. Children, if you like, you may go over and ask Mrs. Gaul if she has a turkey-hen to sell ; I should like a white one best.’

The children were quite pleased, and went that very day to the Gauls’ little farm.

They found Mrs. Gaul in the yard, feeding her poultry, and gave their message.

‘I am so sorry that I have no more white turkeys,’ she said ; ‘but here is a pretty grey hen ; if that would please Mistress Skene she is hearty welcome.’

It was a very pretty bird, speckled grey and white with a small, graceful head and neck.

Fanny and May both thought Mrs. Skene would

be pleased with the grey hen, and Mrs. Gaul said she would send her Jim across with it as soon as he came home from school.

Then, when May and Fanny had looked at all the poultry, and seen the fat pig, Mrs. Gaul made them come inside the house, to have some cakes and honey and a drink of milk.

The little girls knew that Mrs. Gaul would be hurt if they did not accept her kindness, because she was poor, so they said, 'Thank you,' and went in at once.

It was a tiny house of two rooms, built of mud or clay ; it had a thatched roof, and the rooms were very low and dark, for the windows were very small, and would not open. There was a wide chimney, and a fire of peats was burning on the hearth, with a great black pot hanging over it.

Fanny had never been into such a house before, and looked round her to see what it was like.

On a low seat beside the fire sat a very, very old woman, in a white cap, knitting stockings and rocking a cradle. It was a wooden cradle, and the baby was tied into it with a piece of cord twisted round and round.

Mrs. Gaul laughed when she saw Fanny looking about her.

'It's just a but and a ben, you see, miss,' she said ; , but we were all born and bred in it—Granny and all.

Granny is well on for a hundred, but she's as keen as ever she was ; ain't you, Granny ?'

'Ay, ay, as keen as ever,' laughed the old woman.

Mrs. Gaul gave each of the little girls a piece of oat cake spread with nice honey, and a drink of milk, and then she told them to make haste home before it grew dark.

Betty was right. Jock was not so cruel to the other fowls after he had a wife of his own.

The grey hen was a quiet, gentle bird, and ran about after her big husband all day long under the trees, and he spread out his tail and set up his feathers more than ever, and strutted up and down before her, screaming, 'Gobble, gobble, gobble,' from morning till night.

Nearly every day the grey turkey hen laid a large speckled egg.

Mr. Skene liked the turkey's eggs better than anything else for breakfast, so Fanny and May went each day to look for one, and all through the summer they seldom missed finding one.

One day in the autumn Betty came to Mrs. Skene in great distress, and said, 'Oh, ma'am, I do believe the turkey hen has drowned herself in the well ! I have not seen a sign of her for two or three days. Jean and I have hunted all over the place, but we cannot find her, high or low.'

'And we have not found any eggs for two or three weeks, I am sure,' said May.

'Then I daresay she has hidden her eggs in some out-of-the-way place,' said Mrs. Skene. 'Turkeys often do that ; they do not like to have all their eggs taken ; and I should not wonder if she came back with some little turkeys some day.'

But Betty was quite sure that she must be drowned in the well, or starved to death.

After lessons, Fanny and May had a hunt for the turkey hen, but they could not find her, any more than Betty and Jean.

The next day they were having a run outside, for the weather was getting rather cold, when they heard a strange noise beside them, and there was the speckled hen, looking very thin and ill.

They ran at once to get her some nice food, which the poor thing ate up very fast ; she really seemed to be nearly starved.

May and Fanny stood out of sight to watch what she would do when she had eaten her food.

She walked up and down for a little while, and peeped about, as though to make sure that no one was looking, and then she went slowly all round the garden, till she came to some low bushes. She crept under the bushes, so that she was quite hidden, and she did not come out again that night.

The next day, about the same time, she came out

for food. While Betty was feeding her, Fanny and May went to her hiding-place under the bushes, and there they found a nest with thirteen large speckled eggs in it. They ran for Mrs. Skene to come and look. She told them not to touch the eggs, or go near the hen when she was sitting on them.

As the weather was getting cold and rainy, Betty built up a kind of wall of brushwood at the back of the nest, to keep off the wind and rain.

Mistress Turkey sat quite still on her nest for more than three weeks after this, only coming off once a day for food.

It was so wet one day that Mrs. Skene would not let the children go outside at all, for fear they should catch cold, so they had to amuse themselves after lessons as best they could indoors.

They were sitting on the rug before the school-room fire reading story-books, when Betty and Jean both came running into the room holding something in their aprons.

'Do look, Miss May and Miss Fanny! such beauties!' cried Betty.

May and Fanny both jumped to their feet to see what it was. Jean had the turkey hen in her apron, and Betty had a number of tiny turkey chicks in hers.

'Oh, the darling pets!' cried Fanny; 'let us count them.'

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...Mrs.



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...him.
...weighs twelve pounds

said Mrs. Skene; 'so the price would be seven shillings.'

Jim spent about five minutes counting on his fingers, and then said, 'Yes—seven shillings.'

'Well, then, I will give you eight, as you are a good son to your mother,' said Mrs. Skene.

Jim took the eight shillings without a word, and was going off, but Mrs. Skene stopped him and told the servants to give him a basin of hot soup and something to eat, and she had the turkey put into the fowl-house, where it seemed very glad to have the string taken off its legs and be able to run about once more. It spread out its round tail, which was just like a fan, and stuck up all its feathers, and strutted up and down, and out 'Gobble, gobble, gobble,' as it

'Oh, I hear a very turkey!' said May
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look at the young turkeys, for they always had half an hour's play after breakfast before school began.

Betty had put plenty of fresh hay into the turkeys' room, and given them pepper in their food to keep them warm inside ; but alas ! two of the little birds were lying cold and stiff—the frost had killed them in the night.

Fanny was ready to cry at this sad sight.

'You can save your tears, missie, for something worth crying about,' said Betty ; 'you'll have enough to do if you cry over dead chickens.'

And Betty was going to fling them out on the ash-pit, but Fanny begged hard that she might bury them.

'Well, well,' said Betty, 'bury them by all means if you wish, but don't ask me to dig the grave.'

When lessons were over, the children took their spades and dug a hole under a bush in the garden, and there they laid the poor little turkey chicks.

The next day the frost was harder, and there was a cold wind blowing as well, and three more of the poor little pets died, and had to be laid in the grave in the garden.

'I was afraid it would be so,' said Mrs. Skene. 'Young turkeys never can stand the cold ; they require a great deal of care even in fine hot weather. I am afraid, my dears, you will lose them all.'

And Mrs. Skene was right. In spite of all the care and the nice hot food Betty gave them, the children

found one or two poor stiff little chickens when they came down in the morning, till at last there was not one left, and poor Mrs. Turkey Hen was sent back to the poultry-house to live with the other common fowls. And I think that May and Fanny grieved far more over the lost chickens than she did, for she seemed quite happy in a day or two.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOT FIG.

NOT long after the death of the young turkeys, when the little girls rose from their beds one morning and looked out of window, they saw that Tommy Snow had come to visit them as well as Jacky Frost, for a pure white carpet was spread all over the ground.

‘Oh, how lovely!’ cried Fanny, who had never seen such white snow before; for in London, where she had been brought up, the snow no sooner falls than it melts or is turned into dirty black mud by the numbers of people and horses and carts that go along the streets.

It did look lovely; even the very trees were white with snow resting on each tiny branch.

None of the poultry came out at all that day; they kept themselves warm and snug crowded close to each other in their house. And the cows and calves kept warm in the byres, but the little girls had a

good game at snowballing each other after lessons, and came in rosy, warm, and hungry for their dinner.

'I never played at snowball before in all my life, said Fanny ; 'it *is* a nice game ! How I wish the boys would come home from school ! we should have fun then.'

'They will be home in a week or two now,' said Mrs. Skene.

After tea Fanny went up to her room to fetch



something, when she found Jean the housemaid turning down the beds.

'Shall I put a hot pig into your bed to-night, miss ?' asked Jean.

'A hot pig, Jean !' cried Fanny. 'No, thank you. I would rather not sleep with a pig !'

'I thought it would keep you warm ; Miss May always has one when it is very cold,' said Jean.

'Oh, Jean, how can you talk such nonsense ! I

don't believe May would be so dirty as to have a pig in her bed.'

'The pig is quite clean, miss ; I wouldn't think of putting a dirty pig into any one's bed,' said Jean as she left the room, looking quite hurt.

Fanny ran down-stairs and into the dining-room.

'Oh, May, what do you think Jean says?' she began, then she had to stop a minute, she could not go on for laughing.

'Well, what does Jean say?' asked May.

'She says you always have a pig to sleep with you in cold weather!'

'And so I do ; I don't think I could go to sleep without it,' said May quite gravely. She saw nothing to laugh at.

'I would rather be cold than sleep with a nasty dirty pig!' cried Fanny.

'Dirty! it is never dirty, and it is always wrapped up in a nice clean flannel bag,' said May. 'I am no more fond of dirt than you are, Fanny.'

'Well, I call it very dirty of any one to sleep with a pig,' went on Fanny. 'I thought only the poor Irish did such things. Do all the people in Scotland sleep with their pigs in the winter?'

'Yes, all who can get them,' said May, who felt quite angry with her cousin for calling her dirty.

'Come, come, children, don't quarrel,' said Mrs. Skene, who had been laughing over her book. 'I

have no doubt you have often slept with a pig in England too, Fanny.'

'Oh, auntie! I am sure I never did such a thing in all my life!'

'Have you ever had a hot bottle in your bed?'

'Yes, I always do in cold weather.'

'Well, Fanny, that is just the same thing, for in Scotland a hot bottle is called a hot pig!'

When Fanny saw her mistake she laughed more than any one, and ran down to tell Jean she should be very glad to have a hot pig for her bed-fellow.

The weather grew colder and colder, so that the children were glad of pigs or anything else that would keep them warm.

One night it began to snow again; it snowed all that night and all the next day without stopping. Nothing could be seen out of window but the thick blinding snow, that kept on slowly falling, falling, in great white flakes, and the children could not go outside the doors. There was no bright daylight all day, and the lamps had to be lit at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Skene had to go outside to look at his cattle. First he dressed himself in long boots that reached above his knees, a great ulster coat that hung nearly to his ankles, a muffler wound many times round his throat, and a sealskin cap with lappets at the side that covered his ears and buttoned under his chin.

'Now Jack Frost and Tom Snow may do their worst,' he laughed; 'I don't think they will hurt me.'

'No, I don't think they will hurt you, my dear,' said Mrs. Skene; 'but what will become of the poor people that have no warm clothes this bitter weather? I am so glad I bought that flannel last week. Will you help me to make some warm skirts for the poor people, lassies?'

The little girls were glad to think that they could be of any help. So as soon as the lamp was lit they sat round the fire and stitched away with all their might, while Mrs. Skene told them a story.

Just as Jean came in with the tea-things they heard Mr. Skene at the hall door, so they ran to meet him.

He came in with a coating of snow all over him, looking 'just like Father Christmas himself,' as Fanny said.

May and Fanny helped him off with his wraps, and he came into the parlour stamping his feet and rubbing his hands.

'This is winter and no mistake,' he said; 'but you look warm and cosy enough in here, and I mean to sit down and enjoy myself too. What have you been doing with yourselves all day, lassies?'

'We have been helping mamma to make warm skirts for the poor old women in the village,' said May.

'Yes; and auntie says that when they are done

perhaps you will drive us to the village with the parcel,' put in Fanny. 'Will you, uncle dear? it would be so lovely.' And Fanny took hold of her uncle's hand and began to pat and stroke it. That was the way she did to her own father when she wanted to persuade him to do anything.

Mr. Skene stroked his niece's fair head gently, and said,—

'Well, Fanny, if auntie says you have done your work *very* nicely, perhaps I will; but I know some little girls who are not very fond of sewing.'

Fanny blushed at this, for only the week before her aunt had been forced to find fault with her because she would play with the kitten when she ought to have been at her needlework, and she had made her work all dirty.

'I like working for poor people,' she said; 'it is not a bit the same as hemming stupid towels and things; there is no fun in that.'

'Both the lassies have worked well to-day,' said Mrs. Skene; 'so now let us have tea, and then, if they are not tired, perhaps we might do a little more sewing.'

'I should never get tired, if you would always tell us stories while we work, auntie,' said Fanny. 'Will you tell us another story after tea, please?'

'Perhaps, if you asked uncle, he might read us a story out of a book.'

'Oh, do, please, dear uncle!' 'Do, please, papa dear!' cried both the little girls at once. 'Do, do, do, and we will work so fast and so nicely.'

'Well, it so happens that I have just got home a Christmas story, so, as I cannot sew, I may as well help by reading to you,' said Mr. Skene.

So, as soon as tea was over, Mr. Skene sat in the great arm-chair with his feet on the fender, and his slippers on, and Mrs. Skene sat beside him, in her chair, with her work, and the little girls each had a low chair on the other side of the fire.

'Now, I think we shall manage to keep the fire warm,' said Mr. Skene when they were all settled, and he brought a pretty blue book out of his pocket, and began to read.





CHAPTER IX.

THE SLEDGE DRIVE.

THE next day the sun was shining brightly, and the sky was quite blue, instead of nearly black, as it had been for some days lately, and the newly fallen snow sparkled in the sunshine.

Fanny ran to the door to look out at the pretty white world. She jumped from the doorstep into the soft snow, and it reached nearly up to her knees! She found she could not walk through it at all, but was glad to come indoors, and put on some dry shoes and stockings, for hers were quite wet.

'You will have to stay indoors till a road has been cut in the snow,' said Mrs. Skene; 'it is too deep for you to walk in.'

'Never mind; we will stay indoors and finish the skirts,' said Fanny.

'And when the skirts are done, I suppose I must get out the sledge to carry them to the village,' said

Mr. Skene. 'Nothing with wheels will be able to go along the roads for many days, I fear.'

'A sledge! oh, uncle, are we really going in a sledge? Oh, how lovely!' cried Fanny, and she began to jump about, and clap her hands with delight.

The little girls helped so much with the work that in a day or two quite a large bundle of warm clothing was ready to be taken down to the



village, and Fanny was to have her first drive in a sledge.

The children were well wrapped up, and had hoods on their heads to keep out the cold, and sat side by side on one seat of the sledge, with the bundle at their feet, and a great fur rug over all.

The horse had a collar with little bells all round it, which rang whenever he shook his head.

Mr. Skene took his place in the sledge, cracked his whip, and they were off.

Fanny said she had never had a more pleasant drive in all her life; they glided along so fast and smoothly over the snow, and the jingling of the horse's bells made such cheerful music all the way.

'Oh, it is nice! it is quite lovely!' she kept on saying.

They soon reached the village. It was a funny little village close to the sea, with very narrow streets. As it was so near the sea, the snow had melted in the streets, so that the little girls were able to walk along the narrow lanes that led to some of the houses they had to go to with Mrs. Skene's presents.

The poor women and children were very much pleased with the nice warm garments. As they all talked broad Scotch, Fanny could not make out much of what they said, but she could see by their looks that it was something pleasant. And as Fanny could only speak English, the women knew still less what she said, but she smiled and laughed so brightly at them, that they all shook hands with her ever so many times, and said that she was a 'bonny English lassie,' and one woman gave her a parcel of sweeties, and another gave her a 'yellow fish' for her tea, and the children stroked her fur jacket, and said 'Braw, braw;' and Fanny went

back to the sledge, quite pleased, and told her uncle that they were 'dear old women,' and 'darling little children.'

The weather grew colder and colder, so that the snow did not melt, but got harder and harder.

As the children thought it such a treat to go in the sledge, Mr. Skene took them for a short drive each day.

It was near Christmas by this time, and on Friday Mr. Skene went to fetch the boys home; they were not to go back to school for a whole month.

Now, though May and Fanny were very happy always, yet they looked forward to the boys' coming home with great delight.

'Oh, it will be lovely to play with the boys for a whole month!' cried Fanny, clapping her hands.

The boys came home in high spirits, for their schoolmaster had praised them to Mr. Skene. It was true that Frank had got into a few scrapes, but he had been a very good boy at his lessons, for he was almost as fond of his books as he was of his play, whatever he had to do—learning or playing—he threw his whole heart into it, and did it with all his might.

The first day was spent in running about the place and looking at the cattle and horses, and in playing at snowball.

The next day Mr. Skene packed the whole party

of young people into the sledge, and took them for a long drive. He had to call at a house at some distance, and he knew the children would enjoy going with him.

They started soon after breakfast, and reached the house in time to have a good romp with the children there, before the early dinner.

As soon as dinner was over Mr. Skene said they must start for home, as he did not like the look of the sky at all. He was afraid a storm was coming on. And he was right; the snow began to fall almost as soon as they started, and soon the wind began to blow and the cold was bitter.

'It will be a bad job if the wind rises much,' said Mr. Skene, with a shake of his head, and he urged the horse to go faster.

'What do you mean, uncle? why will it be a bad job?' asked Fanny. 'I think it is great fun if it were not *quite* so cold.'

'It will not be great fun if the wind blows much more, I am afraid, little Fanny, for the roads will all be blocked before morning.'

'How blocked, uncle?'

'Blocked by drifts of snow, Fanny.'

Now Fanny had often heard of snowdrifts, and she thought in her own mind that it would be very nice to see one for herself, but as her uncle looked so grave she did not like to say so.

By the time they reached home the wind had risen so much that the trees were swaying their bare arms quite wildly, and great black clouds were driving fast across the sky, and it was nearly dark. May and Fanny were glad enough to be indoors again, and see a bright fire to welcome them.

They had not been in many minutes before they heard a strange loud voice in the kitchen, and Jean came up to say that Mrs. M'Rae was in a great way because her boy Sandy had not yet come home from school, and it was more than an hour past his time.

Mrs. M'Rae was the grieve's wife, and lived in the lodge on the roadside. She was in such distress that she came into the parlour close behind Jean.

'Oh, sir,' she cried, 'I ken fine my loon is lost in the snaw! I telt him no' to gang to school the day, but he's that headstrong he'll no mind a word I say.'

'Don't distress yourself so, my good woman,' said Mr. Skene; 'he cannot be lost in the snow by this time, but I will send his father with a lantern to meet him.'

So the grieve was sent off with a lantern, and it was so long before he came back that poor Mrs. M'Rae gave her boy—'her bonny, bonny loon,' as she called him—up for lost, and Mrs. Skene herself was

quite in a fidget. She was afraid some harm must have come to the lad.

Now Sandy M'Rae was not a good boy; he was up to all sorts of tricks, and sometimes, instead of going to school when he was sent, he played truant, and that made his poor mother afraid that he might be lost in the snow, for she could not feel sure that he had gone to school at all, though he had left home in the morning with his satchel of books slung over his shoulder. The school was two miles off, and Sandy ought to be home by four o'clock, but it was past five when his father set off to look for him.

Alec the grieve went by the short cut across the fields; so many children went that way. He went on and on for more than a mile, but saw no sign of his own or any other child. It had grown quite dark by this time, and the wind was blowing so hard that the man knew there would be no path at all in a few hours, and any child out alone might soon be lost in the snow. So he looked all round him as he went along, and kept crying, 'Sandy, Sandy,' but the only sound to be heard was the wailing of the wind and the distant roar of the sea.

At last the man came in sight of the schoolhouse, and light was streaming from the great blindless windows.

He ran to the door, and, without waiting to knock, he went straight into the schoolroom.

And what did he see there ?

Why, a number of merry children sitting round a great roaring fire, all drinking hot soup out of basins ; and in the midst of them, just in the act of lifting one of the biggest basins to his mouth, was his own lost Sandy !

The kind schoolmaster would not allow the children who lived at a distance to go home alone when he saw what a bad night was coming on. He said he would keep them in the schoolroom till their friends came to fetch them ; and his kind wife had made them some nice hot soup to warm them.

As a good many of the children lived on the road to Sweetwells, Alec M'Rae took charge of quite a troop, and saw each one safe into its own home, so that it was quite late before he reached Sweetwells. It was so dark that they could scarcely find the road ; the snow was driving straight into their faces and nearly blinded them, and the cold was so bitter that Sandy kept crying out because of the pain in his fingers and toes.

But at last they came to a welcome clump of trees, and they knew that they had reached Sweetwells. A few more steps brought them in sight of the lodge.

Mrs. M'Rae was standing at the door with a lantern, peering out into the darkness. She had made herself almost ill with fright because they were so late.

The grieve and his boy were glad enough to reach the safe warm shelter of the snug little cottage. Mrs. M'Rae soon made them some nice hot porridge, and packed them off to bed with a thankful heart, and Sandy had no wish to go to school the next day, or for many days after that.





CHAPTER X.

A SNOWDRIFT.



ANNY'S wish to see a snowdrift was to be granted. All that night the wind blew loud and strong. It roared in the chimneys and almost shook the house, so that Frank said it felt like being in a ship, and it made him think of his dear father, who was spending his winter where there is more snow and frost than even in the north of Scotland. Frank had once been a short voyage with his father, so he knew what it was like to be in a ship.

Well, the wind blew all night, and drove the snow before it, so that by the time morning came there

were hills of snow all round about Sweetwells. The servants could not go out to milk the cows till the men had dug a road through the snow from the back door of the house to the byres.

The snow reached more than half way up the stable door, and it had blown so much in front of the house that they could not open the front door at all.

All that day the men were busy cutting roads through the snow, for the place was quite blocked up ; there was what they called a *wreath* of snow in front of the lodge, about twelve feet high. No one came near the place that day, not even the postman, for no one could get along the roads.

‘What a good thing we have plenty of coals to keep us warm, and oil to keep us light,’ said Mrs. Skene. ‘One winter a few years ago, the snow came so early that we had no stock of either.’

‘And what did you do, auntie?’ asked Fanny.

‘We had a few pounds of candles in the house, and we burnt them, but we had to be very careful not to use them too fast ; and when our coals were done we had to borrow of our neighbours, and they had to borrow oatmeal of us, to make cakes and porridge, for they could not send oats to the mill to be ground. One of our neighbours went to take a peep from one of his doors, and let in so much snow that he could not shut the door again for weeks. There was no service in the church for two Sundays, for no one

could get into the church ; the doors were all blocked up. And I suppose the people in the village would have been starved if they had not been able to send a boat to the town to bring them food and coals ; they could not send up to the farmhouses for anything.'

'I think it must have been jolly,' said Frank ; 'like the siege of Paris, or something of that sort. You know they had to eat cats and dogs then.'

'I'm sure I should not like to have to eat dear Tis, said May. 'I think you are a horrid boy, Frank, to want to eat cats and dogs.'

'I like to know about all those queer things,' said Frank. 'It's stupid never to have any change ; I get tired of always doing the same things.'

'Please, auntie,' said Frank, rushing into the room the next morning, 'have you any blue glasses ?'

'Blue glasses, my dear ? I don't think so. There are some red wine-glasses ; but what do you want them for ?'

'I mean blue goggles to protect our eyes,' laughed Frank. 'We are going to ascend Mont Blanc, and we must wear blue glasses, or we may be struck with snow blindness.'

'I am afraid I cannot provide you with anything of that sort, Frank ; you will have to *make believe*, as you so often do.'

'I suppose we must,' said Frank ; and off he ran back to the barn where they were getting ready.

Frank had grown tired of snowballing and building snow men, and to-day, as there were great hills of snow all about, he had made up his mind to ascend Mont Blanc.

'I am a member of the Alpine Club, you know, and you two will have to be my guides,' he said to Colin and Neil.

'And what are we to be?—guides too?' asked Fanny, who could not bear to be left out of the boys' play.

'Oh no, you would never do for guides,' said Frank, looking at the little girls; 'you would catch cold. You must stay at home.'

'I hate staying at home when you are out having such fun,' pouted Fanny; 'it is very selfish of you, Frank, to play at a game May and I cannot join in.'

'But you can join in this game,' said Frank; 'you and May can be the mistress of the mountain inn and her daughter, and you can help us to get ready to start. We want lots of things, you know.'

'And what shall we do all the time you are away climbing the mountain?'

'Why, you can cook a nice supper ready for us when we return; we shall be hungry enough, I can tell you.'

This idea quite pleased Miss Fanny. 'Very well,' she said; 'we will ask auntie to let us make a cake or some toffee, won't we, May?'

All this time the boys were getting ready. They

put on their warm ulsters, and long boots they had for bad weather, that reached up to their knees, and fur caps.

‘And we must have some long poles to help us climb,’ said Frank. ‘I have often seen pictures of men climbing the Alps, and they always have long poles in their hands, and they are all tied to each other with a strong rope. Do you think you could find a strong rope, Neil?’

Neil soon found a rope and three broom-handles, which Frank said were the very thing.

‘Now, you must go in front, Colin, and you behind, Neil. I must have a guide on each side of me, of course, for fear I should fall.’

So they tied the rope round their waists, and put on the glasses which Frank had cut out of blue paper, and took the broomsticks in their hands, and off they started, in search of the greatest snowdrifts they could find.

The girls watched them till they were out of sight, and then went to the house to ask Mrs. Skene if they might do some cooking. She gave them leave, so they put on some brown holland aprons, and went down to the kitchen, and were soon quite happy, up to their elbows in flour.

By the time the boys came back, they had made a cake, and a number of little pigs, with currants for eyes, and some toffee.

Meantime the boys had a splendid game. They chose the very worst roads they could find, where the wind had blown the snow into great drifts, ten or twelve feet deep, and they went boldly over each one of these.

In some places the snow was frozen so hard that it bore their weight, but more often they sank into it, and had great fun pulling each other out. At last they reached a certain point, which they called the top of Mont Blanc, and there they ate some gingerbread nuts they had in their pockets, and then turned homewards.

By the time they reached home, they were tired out, wet through to the very skin, and half frozen with cold, and they all said they had never had a more jolly day.

It was just as well that Betty had cooked something for their supper, as well as May and Fanny, for they were so hungry that the toffee and little pigs would hardly have made them a hearty enough meal.





CHAPTER XI.

THE CATTLE FAIR.

THE boys had but a few more days of play at home, and then they were to go back to school and work.

‘I have to go to the great cattle fair on Thursday,’ said Mr. Skene one morning at breakfast ; ‘would any of you boys like to go with me, if it is a fine day?’

‘Oh yes, that we should!’ cried all three boys at once, and all the rest of the day they could talk of nothing but the cattle fair.

They had to set off very early on Thursday morning, almost before it was light. They had a good hot breakfast by lamplight, and started in great spirits. It turned out a bright frosty day, with not a cloud in the sky, and the horse trotted along the road at a fine rate. There was plenty to amuse the boys on the road, for there were so many other people going to the fair, in gigs, dogcarts, brakes, carts, and

other traps of all sorts and kinds, besides numbers on horseback, and drovers and farm servants on their own feet.

After a drive of two or three hours, they reached a small town. The streets were full of men and boys, all standing talking in the middle of the road, so that they had to make way for each horse that passed.



Mr. Skene drove up to the inn, and put up his horse and trap, and then he and the boys walked at once to the fair, which was held in a large field just outside the town.

There were long rows of cattle all over the field, with just room between the rows for people to walk. Frank had never seen so many cattle in his life

before. There were great smooth fat beasts with short horns ; and little rough shaggy Highland ones with wide-spreading horns, that made them look very fierce—these were the ones Frank liked best. Then there were fine cart horses, with their manes and tails all tied up with bright ribbons, and little bells on their harness, and their coats rubbed up till they shone again. And there were little Highland ponies, and lovely running horses, with fine arched necks and long slender legs.

They walked all round the field, and at the end they came to a part full of tents and peep-shows, and Aunt Sallies, and all sorts of games and penny stalls.

‘I daresay you are hungry ; I know I am,’ said Mr Skene. ‘We will go into one of those tents and have some lunch, and then you boys can go into some of the shows if you like, while I do my errand. You know I came here to buy a bull, not to amuse myself.’

The boys were quite pleased at this plan. The lunch in the tent was rather rough, but as they were all hungry they found it very good.

Mr. Skene gave Colin a few shillings, and said they were to look out for him in about a couple of hours.

‘I expect by that time I shall have chosen a bull,’

he said, 'and you will have had quite enough of penny shows for once.'

'I think we shall have time to see all the shows,' said Colin ; 'so suppose we begin at the first, and go straight round.'

'And then we will buy some things at the stalls for May and Fanny,' put in his brother ; 'we must not forget that.'

'Of course not,' said Colin ; for these boys never went from home on any treat with their father without bringing home something for their little sister.

So they went the round of all the shows, and saw some of the strangest sights. They saw the 'fattest lady' and the 'smallest gentleman' in Europe. They saw a man that ate fire and a man that ate knives, and a Polish giant, and one man who said that he never ate anything at all, but our boys had too much sense to believe him. Then they saw some poor little fairy girls dancing, dressed in very short cotton skirts, trimmed with gilt paper, and long pink stockings, and gilt paper crowns on their heads. They were pretty little girls, and looked so tired of jumping about to amuse all those rough people, that Frank felt quite sorry for them. Then in the next tent there were some very ugly waxwork figures, shown by a still more ugly old woman smoking

a short clay pipe, who called herself Madame Celeste.

There were some more shows with little worth seeing, and by the time the boys came to the last, they found that Mr. Skene was quite right. They had had enough of penny shows for once.

Then they had a penny ride on some little wooden horses that were driven round and round by a machine that drove the horses and played a barrel organ at the same time. They found this such fun, that they had three penny rides each, much to the delight of the grinning little French master of the 'Grand Circus,' as it was called, who gave them a longer ride each time, and the last time also sang a French song.

By this time the two hours were nearly up, and, besides that, they had not much money left to spend on toys for May and Fanny; so they went to the stalls to choose their presents. To tell the truth, there was not much worth buying, but they took a few funny little things that they thought might amuse their sisters, and they had just spent their last penny when Mr. Skene came up.

'Well, boys,' he said, 'how have you got on? I have bought a first-rate bull. If you want to see him, you must make haste, for the man is just starting to take him home.'

Of course the boys wished to see the bull, so they ran after Mr. Skene to the other side of the show-ground.

It was a great big pure black bull ; even the very whites of his eyes were almost black, and so was his tongue.

‘Well, isn’t that a fine beast?’ said Mr. Skene, with pride ; ‘there is hardly such a bull in all the country round. Don’t go too near him, Frank,’ he added, for Frank was going to stroke the bull’s nose.

‘But surely he could not hurt me, uncle,’ said Frank ; ‘he has no horns. I do wish you had bought one of those fierce ones with such awful horns.’

‘I can tell you that this one would be fierce enough, Frank, if you teased him, even though he has no horns, so I advise you to take care,’ said his uncle. ‘But now it is high time for us to be starting home.’

So they went back to the inn, where they had some nice hot coffee while the horse was being put into the dogcart, and started on their homeward journey. The horse knew that he was going home, so they went spinning along the road at a fine rate, and the children gave Mrs. Skene an account of all they had seen in the fair.

They were all pretty tired by the time they reached Sweetwells, but the boys said they had had a very

jolly day, and the little girls were quite pleased with their penny toys. The next day the boys acted over all the wonders they had seen in the peep-shows at the fair, and Frank very nearly cut his mouth trying to eat a great carving-knife.





CHAPTER XII.

NERO THE BLACK BULL.

THERE was not a person in the house or on the farm who did not go out to see the new bull when he came home. He was so black that he was called Nero. Nero did not seem to like strangers at all ; he looked very sulkily at all the faces round him, and now and then gave an angry snort.

‘I am afraid he has not the best temper in the world,’ said Mrs. Skene.

‘They black lads are never, so to say, sweet in the temper,’ said Bob the cattle-man, who was holding the bull by a chain tied to an iron ring in his nose.

‘Well, bairns, you must not go near him or tease him,’ said Mrs. Skene ; ‘he might do you some harm.’

They all watched while Bob put Nero into his

stall, and hooked his chain to a ring in the wall, and then gave him some food.

'Now we will leave him till he comes to himself,' said Mr. Skene.

But the boys could hardly be kept out of the byres, they were so taken up with the new bull, and they kept running in all day to have a peep at him.

Whenever the bull saw the boys, he glared at them with his dull, sulky eyes, and sometimes gave an angry snort. Colin and Neil kept at a safe distance; they knew Nero was not a playfellow to be trusted.

Now Frank prided himself on never being afraid of anything. This was foolish, because there are some things of which it is well to be afraid; and it is always wise of boys to believe what their elders tell them, and not to meddle with things they have not been used to. But Frank had not learned this lesson, and he thought it showed a fine manly spirit to be ready to dare anything, even a strange bull. So, while his cousins were standing in the doorway watching Nero, Master Frank ran off and fetched a large turnip from the shed. When he came back, he found that his cousins had gone away. He crept along by the side of the bull till he reached his head, and then he held out the turnip; he knew

that most beasts are fond of turnips. 'And even if he should be angry he could not hurt me without horns,' thought Frank to himself.

Nero looked at the turnip and smelt it, then he looked at Frank, and gave a loud angry bellow, and before the boy knew what he was about he found himself down on the ground, with the knees of the angry beast pressed upon him, and his hot breath fanning his face. Frank gave a fearful shriek, and the bull bent his head and gave an angry roar.

At these sounds Colin and Neil came running back to the byre, and there they saw their cousin being crushed to death, as they thought, by the raging bull.

They were but young boys, but they were brave boys, and they were running to Frank's help when the cattle-man rushed in all breathless. He had been at work not far off when he heard the bellowing of the bull, and ran with all his might to the byre, for he felt sure some mischief was going on.

The bull was in an awful rage, and was roaring and foaming at the mouth; and the man was only just in time to prevent the two boys from rushing into the same danger as their foolish cousin.

'Stand back!' he cried, as he ran to the bull's head, and with a pitchfork he had in his hand he

pushed him back, and then dragged Frank from beneath his knees.

Frank was quite senseless, and his cousins thought that he was killed.

‘You had better call your father,’ said the cattle-



man. ‘I cannot leave the bull till he is more quiet—he might break his chain.’

So Colin ran for his father, while Neil sat on the ground with Frank’s head resting on his knee.

Mr. Skene was not far off. He looked very grave when he saw poor Frank, and lifted the boy gently in his arms and took him to the house. He went in

by the kitchen door, so as not to frighten the little girls, and straight up to the spare bedroom, where he laid the boy on the bed.

Then he said, 'Now, Colin, call your mamma ; and, Neil, you tell M'Rae to go on the fast horse at once, and fetch the doctor, without one moment's loss of time.'

Frank was still quite senseless when the doctor came, but he was not dead, as his cousins had feared, though he had had a very narrow escape. Some of his ribs were broken, and the doctor said he would have to lie quite still in bed for a long time before he could be cured. And he not only had to lie still in bed, but he had to bear a great deal of bad pain. Poor Frank ! he saw now that it was wiser to believe what his uncle said, and he thought he would never be foolhardy again.

So Colin and Neil went back to school and left their cousin lying groaning in bed. Frank felt almost ready to cry like a girl when they came in to say good-bye to him. It was very hard to have to lie there quite still instead of going back to all the fun at school, and working for the prize which he had made up his mind to win. But there was no help for it ; in bed he must lie till the doctor gave him leave to rise ; and, though the tears were very near his eyes, he was not going to make a baby of himself before

his cousins, so he laughed when he shook hands with them, and then turned to the story-book he was reading, for that was the only thing he could do to amuse himself in bed.

The house seemed very quiet with Colin and Neil away, and Frank in bed, after all the late noise and fun. A good deal of Mrs. Skene's time was taken up nursing Frank. The little girls still did their lessons in the morning, but they spent the greater part of the rest of the day in Frank's room, when he was well enough to have them with him. Some days he was so ill that he could not bear to see any one but his kind aunt ; but after a week or two his pain had nearly all gone, and he could enjoy having the little girls to play with him and read to him.

It was a good thing that Frank was always happy when he had a nice book. While he was lying in bed he read all the boys' story-books that were to be had in the town, for his uncle never forgot to bring him home something when he went to market on Friday.

It was a grand day when Frank first came downstairs. From that time he began to get well fast, and before long he was able to go outside and run about a little. He very much wished to pay a visit to his friend Nero, but Mr. Skene would not let him do so.

‘The sight of you might make Nero angry,’ said Mr. Skene. ‘Bulls do not forget quickly, and when they have once hurt a person they like to do it again; so, for some time to come, Frank, I think you will have to keep out of Nero’s way, unless you wish to get your ribs crushed a second time.’

And this time Frank was wise enough to take his uncle’s advice.

But no sooner did Frank begin to feel so well and strong that his aunt thought he might soon go back to school, than May began to feel ill. She came down one morning with black rings round her eyes, and her throat was so sore that she could not eat any breakfast; and after breakfast her head ached so that she could not do her lessons, and was obliged to go and lie down instead.

The next day she was worse instead of better, and the doctor had to be sent for. He said she had caught the scarlet fever, which was a good deal about, and that Frank and Fanny had better be sent away at once, or they might catch it too.

‘We were thinking of sending Frank back to school in a few days,’ said Mrs. Skene.

‘But you must not send him to school now,’ said the doctor; ‘he might carry the fever with him and give it to the other boys. Send him and his sister to some house where there are no children near.’

So that very day Frank and Fanny were bundled off to a little cottage on the seashore, where a woman called old Eppie lived. Old Eppie had once been a servant to Mr. Skene's mother, and Mrs. Skene knew she could be trusted to take the very greatest care of the children, and would be quite proud to have the charge of them.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW PLAY-ROOM.

THOUGH Eppie's cottage was small, it was as clean as clean could be, and the children were quite pleased with their new quarters. Their uncle took them down himself, and a cart followed with their clothes and books and toys. We must not forget Peter, who ran after Fanny wherever she went.

'Indeed you may trust them with me, the bonny, precious bairns,' said old Eppie; 'I will let no harm come to them if I can prevent it, Mr. Skene.'

'I am quite sure of that, Eppie,' said Mr. Skene, 'or I would not have brought them to you.'

Old Eppie had a kind, good face, and she always wore a clean muslin cap with a frill close round her face. She was a widow, and she had one son, called Dod.

Dod was a tall, red-haired boy, with freckles all over his face and hands. He was sixteen years old,

but in many ways he was still a child, for he had never been bright. He was handy and clever enough in some things, and, though he had a weak head, he had a strong body. He had never been able to learn to read; in fact, he had not quite so much sense as most boys have; but he was quite harmless, and had a very good temper, and he would do anything for those who were kind to him.

Frank and Fanny soon made great friends with



Dod, and, as by this time the weather was bright and fine, the three used to spend nearly the whole day on the beach.

Dod was just the sort of playfellow to please the English children. He knew all the caves in the rocks, and the pools where fishes could be seen swimming about, and where to find the most lovely shells and seaweeds. Besides this, on a calm day he sometimes took them for a row in his boat, the

'Pixy;' for, though Dod could not read, he could manage a boat quite well, and he got his living by catching fish near the shore.

For the first few days after Frank and Fanny went to stay with old Eppie, Mr. Skene rode down each morning to see them; but May grew so very ill, and her fever turned out to be such a very bad one, that the doctor said no one from Sweetwells ought to go near the village. And so it came about that for many weeks the English children were left very much to themselves, and never saw anything of their uncle or aunt. Two or three times a week they wrote to say how they were getting on, and they often got a letter back, but that was all.

Of course they were very sorry to hear of dear little May's illness, but in spite of that they had a very happy time.

Old Eppie was so kind that she could not do enough for young master and missie. She was always cleaning their rooms, or washing their clothes, or cooking something nice for them to eat; and nothing pleased her more than for them to come in so hungry that they cleared the table of all her good things.

Eppie's cottage stood a little way off from the village. The fishermen were nearly all gone away with their boats to Shetland, where they always spent many weeks of the spring and summer catching herrings, and the folks in the houses round about

who had children of their own were afraid to go near Frank and Fanny because of the fever, so they might have been a little dull and lonely if it had not been for Dod; but he was so droll that he could always amuse them, and they had plenty of nice books to read when they were tired of play.

They found a splendid cave not far from Eppie's cottage, which they turned into their play-room. They could sit in this cave, even on a very windy day, and not feel a bit cold, and here they spent a great part of their time, and had all sorts of fine games. They often played at being shipwrecked sailors cast on a desert island, and that the cave was their only shelter. Though Dod was so big, he liked these games quite as much as the children did. So Frank was the captain, and Fanny was his wife, and Dod was the sailor who ran about and waited on them.

Dod brought down an old trunk from his mother's cottage on his strong shoulders, and put it in a dark corner of the cave, and in this trunk they kept most of their books and toys.

They grew so fond of the cave, that when it was fine they often begged old Eppie to give them their dinner in a basket, that they might eat it there, and they would spend nearly the whole day there, and only return home to the cottage when the sun began to sink behind the western rocks.

Now, as we know, Frank was very fond of reading, and Fanny was very fond of being read to, or being told stories to.

Often on a warm day the three would sit on the beach in the mouth of their cave, and Frank would read aloud. The tales he was most fond of were about sailors or soldiers, or men who went into strange countries to shoot wild beasts or find out the source of some river.

Dod had never cared for books in all his life before, but he was quite taken up with Frank's tales. He would lie quite still at Frank's feet, and listen for hours, with his mouth wide open and his eyes fixed on the boy's face, while he read of those strange far-off lands, and all the wonders that are to be seen there.

'When I am a man I shall travel about and try to find out some new country,' said Frank one day.

'And I will go with you and be your man,' said Dod.

'And I will go too, and cook your dinners and mend your clothes,' said Fanny.

So the thing was quite settled between them, and they often talked about the journeys they meant to take.

One day a parcel of things came from the town for Frank and Fanny, for, though Mr. and Mrs. Skene could not see their nephew and niece, they did not

forget them, even though they were in such trouble about their own little daughter.

In this parcel there were some new books, which Frank took off to the cave the very next day.

One of these books was the story of some men who went to find the way to the North Pole, and lost their ship, and were nearly lost themselves among the ice. It was a long tale, and told of how the poor men lived for nearly a year in that awful cold, and were very near being frozen or starved to death ; and how they were found at last by some other kind men who went in a ship on purpose to look for them, and brought them all safely back to England.

Frank read this story twice over straight through, and while he was reading it they could scarcely talk of anything else.

‘Oh, Frank, it is just like our papa ! He has gone to the North Pole, and perhaps he is lost in the ice like those poor men,’ said Fanny, and the very thought made her cry. ‘He said he would be back in about a year, and I am sure it is more than a year since he went away. Oh, Frankie, do let us get some one to go and look for him.’

The more they thought about it the more certain Frank and Fanny felt that their father must be lost in the ice.

But who could they get to go in search of him ? All the fishermen were away at Shetland, and they

could not see their uncle to speak to him about it.

Frank grew very grave and thoughtful, and for some days he was always looking at the map.

One day he said, in a very solemn tone, 'Fanny, I have quite made up my mind. I am going to search for our father, and I shall take Dod with me; he is very strong, and knows quite well how to manage a boat, and he has been more than once to Shetland to the herring fishing. I am sure I could not have a better person. I have been thinking about it for days, and I mean to start as soon as ever I can get things ready.'

Fanny heard in silence. She had great faith in her brother, and thought he was clever enough to do anything.

'Look here,' he went on, showing her the map; 'it will be quite easy to find the way to the North Pole from this. See, this is where we are, and there is nothing but sea between us and the North Pole. I shall go straight on and on till we come to papa. The ice will be nearly melted by this time, and I have no doubt he has lost his ship and is just waiting for some one to come and fetch him, like those poor men in the story. But you must not tell any one, Fanny; you are the only person I have spoken to about it yet. Now promise on your word and honour that you will not speak of my plan to a single soul till I

give you leave, or they will try to stop me, and I have quite made up my mind that I *will* go.'

So Fanny promised on her word and honour, and to make the promise more binding Frank told her she must 'kiss the book,' which he had heard of being done in courts of justice.

So Fanny very gravely kissed the book he held out to her,—it was the atlas.

'But of course I shall go with you,' she said.

'*You!* of course not; a woman would only be in the way,' said Frank, in a tone of great contempt.

'I am sure I should not be in the way; I should be a great help,' she said. 'I could get all the food ready, and I could steer the boat, and keep watch when you got tired. I'm sure I could do lots of things to help. You know those men in the story always took turn and turn about. I don't believe two of you alone would be able to manage at all, and, besides, I should be so wretched all alone here, when you were gone;' and she began to cry.

'We will see what Dod says,' said Frank. 'I have not spoken to him yet.'

So he called Dod; but, before he told him the grand secret, Frank made him also kiss the atlas and promise 'on his solemn word and honour not to speak of it to a living soul.'

Dod seemed a little afraid of this awful way of making a promise, but at last he did as Frank

wished, and then he heard what the secret was.

‘And I am to take you in the “Pixy?”’ he asked.

‘Yes; are you willing?’ said Frank. ‘I am sure my father will pay you well.’

‘Yes, yes!’ cried Dod, jumping about with delight, and laughing aloud. ‘You can trust Dod. Dod will go with young master and missie all over the world. Dod will be a man now, and no one will laugh at him any more.’

‘But I don’t think I shall take my sister,’ said Frank. ‘You see, Dod, she would be no use; and it might hurt her. You know we shall have plenty of hardships.’

On hearing this Dod put on a sullen look and turned away.

‘Dod will not take you in his boat if bonnie wee missie doesn’t go too,’ he said. ‘No, no; Dod will stay with missie.’

‘Of course Dod has too much sense to think of going without me,’ said Fanny in triumph. ‘You are a good, dear, old Dod.’

Frank had learned by this time that poor silly Dod had a strong will of his own, and that if he once took a whim into his head no one could drive it out. So he saw that the only way to carry his point was to yield, or he would not get Dod or his boat either. And, to tell the truth, Frank knew he would be far

more happy, and enjoy the whole thing much more, if he had his little sister with him.

‘Well,’ he said slowly, ‘if you are quite sure that the hardships will not make you ill, Fanny, you may go with us. Of course I should like to have you, but I was afraid you would not be strong enough.’

But Fanny was quite sure that she was strong enough to bear anything, and that she could make herself very useful. So the dispute was ended.

The children set to work at once to prepare for their voyage, for they were in a great hurry to be off.

Dod overhauled his boat to make sure that she was all right, and Frank and Fanny began to lay in stores.

They found that the men in the story took a great deal of tinned meat, so they went to the village shop and bought all the tinned meat they could get there.

The shopman thought it rather strange of these English children to want so much tinned meat, but he made no remark, and as they had not enough money to pay for all they bought he said that did not matter, they could pay at any time.

Besides the tinned meat they bought some jam, a flask of oil, a dozen boxes of matches, some tea and some essence of coffee, a kettle, and two oilskin caps, such as the fishermen wore in rough weather. Dod

had one. They also bought some strings of glass beads, which Frank said they should find very useful to give to the natives in exchange for food. But when Fanny asked what natives he did not seem quite to know.

All these things the children took to their cave with the help of Dod. They would not allow the shopman to send anything.

‘I think we must borrow a few things of your mother, Dod,’ said Frank. ‘We will bring them back, or pay for them if they get spoilt!’

‘But we must not take Eppie’s things away without asking her leave,’ said Fanny. ‘I will tell her we want a few things just for a little while, and she is so kind I am sure she will lend them.’

‘Very well, Fanny; perhaps that will be the best way.’

Old Eppie was much too busy to trouble her head about the children’s play. So long as they were hungry and looked well and happy she was content; and when Fanny asked her if they might borrow a few of her things for a little while, she said, ‘Surely, my lammie; just make yourself free to take whatever you please.’

So they took some blankets down to the cave, and a saucepan and some plates and cups and knives and forks and spoons, and a lantern.

The stores were packed in the old chest, which Dod

put into the bottom of the boat ; he said it would serve as ballast, and at last all was ready.

‘Are you quite sure you know the way?’ asked Fanny, the day before they had made up their minds to start.

‘Know the way! of course I do!’ said Frank. ‘Dod will hoist the sails, and I will steer straight to the north. I have a first-rate pocket compass that papa gave me on my birthday, before he went away. I shall guide the boat by that.’

‘We must leave a letter for uncle or aunt to say that we have gone to look for papa, or they will be in a fright about us,’ said Fanny.

‘No, we will not leave a letter; we will put one into a bottle, and throw it into the sea when we are well started,’ said Frank; ‘that is what sailors who have lost their way always do.’

‘But do you think we shall lose our way?’ asked Fanny, whose courage was failing her just a little. ‘I do wish uncle could have gone with us.’

‘Don’t be such a silly!’ said Frank. ‘It will be much grander to find papa all by ourselves. Just think how pleased he will be when he sees us; and as to losing our way—why, we couldn’t. We have only to keep sailing straight on to the north. I have put the book and the atlas into the chest to guide us.’

As Frank seemed so sure of what he was about,

Fanny thought she might trust him. She was afraid that if she showed any sign of fear he might leave her behind after all, and she was just as much set upon going as her brother was himself. So she said, laughing,—

‘Oh yes; there is no fear. You have read such lots of books that of course you know all about it, Frank.’

‘Yes; and I have been a voyage with papa,’ he said.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE VOYAGE OF THE 'PIXY.'



T last all was ready, and they were to start on their voyage.

'We will start at night,' said Captain Frank, 'after Eppie has gone to bed. So we shall be well on our way before any one knows that we are off, and no

one will be able to stop us.'

They were very busy all day, making all ready ; and they asked Eppie to pack up some food in a basket over-night, as they meant to spend the whole of the next day out of doors.

'Perhaps we shall start before you are up,' said Fanny.

Eppie did not seem to think that at all likely ; but

she packed the basket as they wished, with plenty of food, and a large bottle of milk, and said, as they were to be away all day, she would give the house a good cleaning.

The children had supper, and went to bed early.

When the young folks were safely in their rooms, old Eppie shut up her house and went to her bed, and soon it was easy to hear that she, at least, was in a sound sleep.

When this fact was certain, Frank crept softly to Fanny's room. He found his sister fast asleep, for the little girl was tired. He gently roused her, and told her she must get ready to start.

She was wide awake in a moment.

'Put on the warmest things you have,' said Frank, 'and then come to me.'

In a few minutes Fanny was ready, and she went to her brother's room, which was next to hers. These two were the only up-stairs rooms,—Eppie and Dod slept on the ground-floor. Frank was standing at the open window, talking to Dod, who was outside.

'Now, Fanny, are you quite ready?' asked Frank, in a whisper.

'Yes, quite,' said Fanny, all in a tremble.

'Well, then, the sooner we are off the better. I will help you through the window, and Dod will catch you. Then I will follow.'

There was no reason at all why the children should not have left the house by the front door, of which Eppie had only turned the key, but it seemed more like a story to escape by the window. So they chose that way.

The window was a very small one, but Fanny was not very big, so she squeezed herself through ; and, as the house was very low, she jumped with ease into Dod's arms, and soon found herself safe on her own feet in the little garden.

Frank was much too great a man to let any one help him. He said he would jump by himself, but if Dod had not been close by, and stretched out his arms, Frank would have had an ugly fall, and most likely stopped the whole thing, for it was not such an easy jump as he had thought.

Well, there they were, all safe and sound, outside the house, and old Eppie fast asleep inside. Dod took up the basket poor old Eppie had packed, and off the three set, as fast as their legs could carry them. They were in such haste, and in such fear of being stopped, that they would not even speak.

They had not gone many yards from the cottage when they heard a sort of cry behind them. At the sound Frank began to run, but Fanny turned round. She knew the voice ; it was that of her faithful little pet, the kitten Peter.

'You darling, you shan't be left behind, that you

shan't,' she said, as she took the kitten up into her arms, and ran after the boys.

It was a still, mild night. The summer days are so long in that northern part of the world, that there is scarcely any night at that time of the year. The dusk has scarcely faded into dark before the dawn begins to rise in the east.

Dod knew this, for he had often been out whole nights, fishing, in the summer.

They reached their cave without any mishap, or meeting a single person. There was not even a boat within sight, and all was very still. The only sound to be heard was the sea washing the pebbles on the beach, and now and then the cry of some night-bird in the distance. As all was quite ready, they had only to go aboard the 'Pixy,' and push off from the shore.

This was soon done. Then Dod took the oars and Frank the helm, and Fanny wrapped herself and Peter in a blanket, and they were off!

Dod rowed for some distance, and then he hoisted a sail, for a fresh breeze was blowing from the land, which, he said, would soon carry them out to sea.

'Now, captain, you and missie just lie down and have a bit of a sleep,' said Dod. 'You will have plenty of work when we get farther out to sea.' Dod always called Frank captain.

Frank said he would not think of going to sleep; he never heard of such a thing.

Fanny was quite willing to take Dod's advice, and was asleep in a few minutes, and before long Frank began to nod in spite of himself, and soon he too was fast asleep beside his sister.

Dod was well pleased. It was nothing to him to keep watch in a boat all night ; he had often done it before. The poor weak-headed, good-hearted fellow had never been so proud in all his life before. He felt himself quite a man, a person that no one could laugh at any more, now that he had the charge of these two 'bonnie English bairnies,' as his mother called them, and he meant to take good care of them, and bring them and their father safe home again. No one had ever trusted Dod before in such a way, but all the world should see that Dod was worthy to be trusted.

Some such thoughts as these floated through his weak brain as he guided the boat, and watched the sleeping children.

Besides the delight of being trusted and treated as a man, Dod was highly pleased at the voyage itself. He had often longed to sail away, away, to the place beyond the sea, where the sun set at night and rose in the morning ; and now he was really going to that bright bonnie place with the red and yellow sky, which he so wanted to see.

The sun was quite high up in the sky when Frank and Fanny woke the next day.

Frank rubbed his eyes and looked round him quite puzzled.

'Why, where are we?' he said; 'I must have been asleep.'

By this time they were far out at sea. It was a lovely day, the sun was shining brightly, and the 'Pixy' danced along on the crests of the blue waves.

The children bathed their hands and faces in the sea, and then looked into Eppie's basket to see what they could find for breakfast, for they were all hungry.

They drank some milk, and ate some hard-boiled eggs and oat cakes and butter, and felt all the better. Then Dod had a nap, for the poor fellow could not deny that he felt a little sleepy.

'And now shan't we throw our letter into the sea?' said Fanny. 'I am sure Eppie will wonder what has become of us.'

So Frank wrote this letter:—

'DEAR EPPIE,—Please tell uncle that we have gone to the North Pole to look for papa. We shall be back soon and bring him with us. We are all well. Fine weather, wind south. Love to all from Frank and Fanny, and your own son Dod.'

As the boat tossed about a good deal, the writing was rather shaky. When done, the letter was put into a bottle, which Frank corked and tied down with

a bit of rag. Then he stood up in the boat and tossed the bottle into the sea.

'Good-bye, you funny postman,' cried Fanny; 'mind you take our letter safe to old Eppie.'

Then the two children watched the bottle as it bobbed up and down on the top of the waves till it was out of sight. They were glad to see that the bottle floated away from them, straight towards the shore, for the tide was going in, and the wind from the land was still bearing them farther out to sea.

When Dod woke, he said by the sun it must be two o'clock. Dod always knew what o'clock it was by looking at the sun.

'I am sure it is time to have dinner, then,' said Frank, 'and I am very hungry.'

So they ate the good dinner old Eppie had made ready for them, and drank some more milk. Of course Peter got his share of the good things too, and all were very merry. But before the day was done, they began to feel rather tired of sitting still so long, for the 'Pixy' was too small to allow them to move about much. So they had an early supper, as there was no tea, and Frank and Fanny were glad to lie down and stretch their legs that way.

Soon they were fast asleep, and Dod began his second lonely night-watch.

And so passed the first day of the voyage of the 'Pixy.'

By good chance the weather was very fine, and the wind only just fresh enough to drive the 'Pixy' swiftly across the blue waves on her way to the north, and the second day of the voyage passed off very well ; only towards night Fanny began to feel very dirty from want of a bath, and her legs felt cramped from want of running about ; but she would not utter one word of complaint for fear Frank should wish she had not come.

But, to tell the truth, Frank was feeling much the same as his sister, and wishing that he could only change his clothes and have a good bath ; but he too held his tongue.

As for Dod, it made small odds to him whether he had a bath or not. He often went for days at a time without either washing or changing his clothes, and, in fact, looked upon being quite clean as a respect due only to Sunday. It did not seem to him worth the trouble of having a good wash except to go to church.

Peter ran about the boat, or slept in Fanny's lap, and seemed to be quite happy, and made a good deal of fun for the children.

On the second night they drank the last drop of milk for supper, Fanny sharing hers with Peter.

There was nothing but a bottle of water left to drink.

'We must look out for a ship to get a fresh supply of water,' said Frank, looking gravely at the bottle.

'I think we ought to meet some ship in the morning ; don't you, Dod ?'

'Oh yes, we shall meet lots of ships in the morning,' said Dod. 'There will be wind in the morning, and all the fishing-boats will be coming home.'

'Well, then, Fanny, I think we had better go to sleep ; don't you ?'

'Yes,' said Fanny, in a somewhat dismal tone. The poor child was getting very, very tired. 'Do you think we shall find papa soon ?'

'Oh yes ; in a few days, I hope,' said Frank. 'We must have come a long way now ; I daresay we shall reach the ice in a day or two.'

Dod was right. The next morning there was much more wind, and the tiny vessel was tossed about roughly on the waves. It was very cold too, and Fanny was glad enough to put on her fur jacket.

It was but a poor breakfast the children had that morning. A little cold water, and some stale bread, with a little bit of meat out of a tin.

Towards mid-day it began to rain, and now and then the wind came in fierce, wild gusts that tossed the 'Pixy' about as though she had been a mere shell, and the spray from the waves washed the boat and drenched the children.

'What a good thing I thought of the oilskin caps,' said Frank, as he brought out those treasures and put one on Fanny's head, and one on his own. And

indeed they did prove a great comfort, for their broad brims caught the rain and the spray too.

Frank had always been a kind brother to his little sister when she was in any trouble, and now he made her sit at the bottom of the boat, and wrapped a blanket round her to keep her warm and dry.

'Is there going to be a storm? Are you afraid?' said Fanny, whose little heart began to quake.

'Afraid! what nonsense!' said Frank, trying to speak in a very brave tone. 'We must expect to get some dirty weather; this is nothing; the wind will soon go down, I've no doubt.'

So Fanny tried to take comfort, and folded her kitten in her arms, and sat very still, huddled up in her blanket in the bottom of the boat.

But instead of going down, the wind grew stronger and stronger, and at last even Dod's brave, merry face began to look very grave, and he told Frank he thought they had better put into some harbour till the storm was past.

'But there is no harbour,' said Frank; 'there is no land that I know of, till we get to the North Pole.'

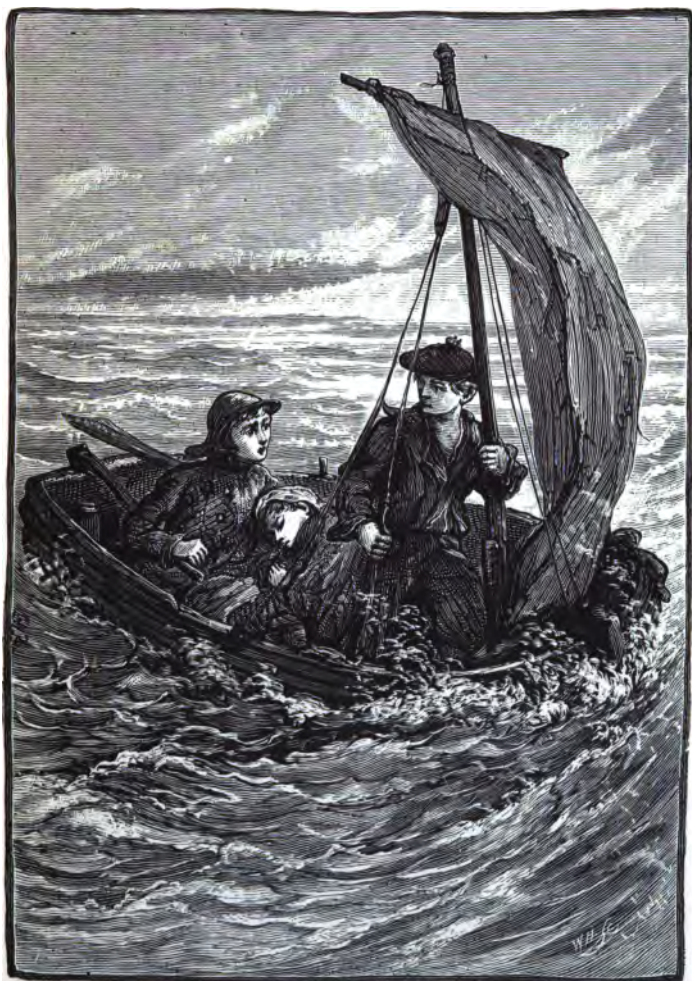
Dod looked round in dismay. He thought he could manage a boat, but he had never been out alone in a storm, and he did not know what to do. He took in the sail, and sat down quite helpless.

Frank tied a white cloth to the top of the mast as

a signal of distress, and sat down too,—for he could do nothing either.

And so, hour after hour, the 'Pixy' drifted on before the wind, and the three wretched children crowded close to each other, waiting in silence for what might happen next,—each one in a state of horrid fright, but not willing to own it for fear of being thought a coward.





"Hour after hour the 'Pixy' drifted on before the wind."



CHAPTER XV.

OLD EPPIE IN TROUBLE.

THE morning that the 'Pixy' started on her voyage, old Eppie rose early to get ready for the 'good cleaning' in which she took so much delight.

She had all her pails and scrubbing-brushes ready, and was only waiting for the bairns to come down and get their breakfast and be off, and leave the house free for the day, when she found that the basket she had packed over-night was gone.

'Why, then, little missie was right, and they have got the start of me for once,' she said to herself; 'and I can set to my cleaning without more ado.'

To make quite sure she went up to the bedrooms, and, finding them empty, she at once set to work, heart and soul.

She scrubbed and brushed and rubbed all through the long summer day, till her little house was as

fresh and bright and clean as soap and water and strong hands could make it.

Before sunset her task was done. She looked round her with pride and pleasure ; spread the table, and made all things ready to give the children a good meal as soon as they came home, and then sat down with her knitting to take a little rest.

But the sun set, and the moon rose, and no children came, and Eppie began to wonder what could make them so late. 'Puir wee bairnies, they'll be fine and tired when they do come,' thought Eppie. 'I'll gie that rascal of a Dod a good scolding for taking them so far awa'.'

At last it grew as dark as the summer night ever was in that place ; all the neighbours had shut up their houses and gone to bed, and Eppie began to feel some alarm about her charges. So she thought she would go a little way to see if they were coming.

She locked the house door, put the key in her pocket, and started along the beach towards the big cave, which she knew they had turned into a sort of play-room.

She went on and on, but there was no sign of the children. At last she reached the cave, but they were not there, though some of their things were lying about.

She stood looking round her, when, to her dismay, she saw that the 'Pixy' was gone.

Now, though her son had but little wit, old Eppie had plenty, and she knew the meaning of this at once, —the children had gone for a sail.

She put her hand above her eyes, and scanned the sea all round, but not a boat was within sight.

Now Eppie had been a fisherman's wife, and she could read the sea and the sky pretty truly. She



saw that there was no sign of foul weather at present, and she knew that when it was fine her Dod could manage a boat with the best of them. So she turned towards home with little fear of the children's safety, though she quite made up her mind to punish her naughty son well the next day, for playing such a trick.

She walked slowly home, always looking out for the 'Pixy'—but, as we know, the 'Pixy' was far away by this time.

When Eppie reached home, she made up the fire, put on the kettle, and again took up her knitting. But she was tired after her hard day's work, and soon her knitting dropped from her hands, and she began to nod, and at last went off into a good sound sleep.

When she awoke, the sun was shining brightly into the room. She started to her feet, rubbed her eyes, and looked round her, quite puzzled. For a minute or two she could not make out how she came to be sitting there with her clothes on, instead of being in her bed. Then it all came back to her like a flash. And the bairns were not come home yet!

And now, for the first time, the old woman began to fear that some mishap had come to them.

She went to her cottage door, and looked out upon the shining sea. A few boats were going out, but none were coming in, and there was no sign anywhere of the 'Pixy,' which she knew at a distance as well as she did the face of her own son.

A neighbour was strolling on the beach, and she begged him to run to the cave, and tell her if the 'Pixy' or the children were there.

All the folks in the place knew that the English children spent most of their time in the big cave.

The neighbour ran off, and soon came back to say that there was no sign of either boat or bairns.

Then Eppie told him her story, and he said he would go off at once in his boat to look for the children on the sea, while she went up to Sweetwells, to tell their uncle that they were missing.

'And how I can dare face him with sic news, I dinna ken,' said the poor old woman.

But she was a brave, true woman, and she knew it must be done. So she took her staff in her hand, and trudged off, up the steep, winding road that led to Sweetwells.

It was a most lovely morning. The dew on the grass was sparkling in the bright sunshine. The birds were all chirping and singing as they flew about, hunting for their breakfast, and the whole world looked so fresh and fair and glad, that it did not seem as though harm could come to any one on such a day.

Mr. and Mrs. Skene were just sitting down to breakfast, with hearts very full of thankful joy, when they heard a loud ringing at the house bell.

Their hearts were full of joy for two reasons.

The first was that their dear little daughter May was out of all danger, and, the doctor said, would soon be quite well again.

And the second reason was that the postman had just brought them a letter which they had long been

looking for, and that letter told them some very good news.

What the good news was you shall hear by and by.

Jane ran to answer the loud ring, and found Eppie at the door, all out of breath with her climb up the steep hill.

‘I must see the master this minute,’ she said.

‘Come in and sit down, Eppie,’ said Jane; ‘you look quite done up.’

‘Na na, I wunna enter the house. I wunna make bad worse by taking the fever back wi’ me; but fetch the master to speak to me here, lassie.’

Jane went to the parlour, and told him that old Eppie wished to speak to him at the door.

Mr. Skene went to her at once, and Mrs. Skene made Jane follow with a cup of good hot tea, and a plate full of meat.

‘Perhaps she had better not come into the house; but make her sit down outside, and have some breakfast,’ said Mrs. Skene. ‘I will not see her myself, as I have only just left May’s room. It would hardly be safe.’

When Mr. Skene heard the old woman’s story, his glad face turned very grave, and he saw that search must at once be made for the missing children.

Without a moment’s loss of time he had his horse saddled, and went as fast as he could gallop down to

the village, and soon two or three boats were sent off to look for the 'Pixy.'

One sailed to the east, one to the west, and one to the north,—but none of them overtook the 'Pixy.' She had had too long a start.

For days and nights search was made, on land and sea, for the missing children, but not a trace of them was to be found.

Soon all the country round knew that the English children and daft Dod, as he was called, were lost, and most feared that they were all drowned.





CHAPTER XVI.

‘A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED.’

BUT they were not drowned, though they were very near it.

The wind grew stronger and stronger, and the rain beat with fury upon the little open boat that was tossed about like a cockleshell upon the angry waves ; and each wave seemed as though it must swamp the tiny craft.

Three more wretched children could hardly have been found than Frank and Fanny and daft Dod towards the end of the third day of their voyage. They were cold and wet and hungry ; and, worse almost than that, they were very thirsty, for their supply of both milk and water was just done. Added to all this, they were very much afraid. Even Dod had lost his courage at last, and poor Fanny could not keep back her tears, but sobbed into the soft coat of Peter, who kept giving dismal whines.

How they wished, now that it was too late, that

they had not started on their voyage without asking the advice of some grown-up person.

The daylight was just fading away in the west, and fearless Frank trembled when he thought that another night of peril had begun.

'Fanny,' he said, in a very shaky voice, 'the night is coming. I suppose it would be bed-time if we were at home. Will you say your prayers out loud?'

'Yes, missie dear; say your prayers, do,' added Dod.

So Fanny checked her sobs and tried to steady her voice while she said the prayers she had been taught when she was a tiny child.

After this they all felt a little more calm, and they were trying to settle things for the night, when, all of a sudden, Dod started to his feet and gave a loud cry.

'A ship! a ship!' he shouted; and he tore his muffler from his neck and held it out to stream in the wind as a signal. The towel was still flying from the masthead.

At first the ship went straight on her course and took no notice of the 'Pixy' or her crew.

They all shouted till they were nearly hoarse and waved their hats, and at last, oh, joy! the ship began to turn towards them.

They had lost all control over the 'Pixy,' and could

not do anything but wait to see what would happen.

After what seemed a very long time the ship came quite near, and a man asked them through a speaking-trumpet how they came there.

'We are on our way to the North Pole, and have been overtaken in this storm—and we have no more water,' shouted Frank, who became quite lively the moment help was near.

In a few more minutes a boat was lowered from the ship and two men came rowing up. They did not wait to ask many questions, but tied a rope to the 'Pixy' and towed her to the side of the ship, which was a small sailing vessel called the 'Stormy Petrel,' laden with timber from Norway.

In a few more minutes the children found themselves on board the 'Stormy Petrel,' and the captain, who was a Scotchman, asking them questions.

When he had heard Frank's story he laughed, and patted the boy kindly on the head.

'I don't think you will reach the North Pole this voyage,' he said ; 'it is well we picked you up, or your lives would not have been worth much by morning in that shell, and such a dirty night as we are going to have. Now, youngsters, come down to my cabin and get out of these wet things.'

They were taken to the little cosy cabin, and soon had off their dripping things and were clothed in

warm dry garments instead, and then set down to a good meal, with some nice hot coffee to drink.

When they had been warmed and fed they were each packed away for the night in what seemed to them the very best beds they had ever slept in ; and, in spite of the tossing of the ship and the roaring of



the wind and the shouts of the sailors, they all slept soundly, for their three days' voyage in the 'Pixy' had quite tired them out.

For the next day or two the weather was what the captain called dirty,—that is to say, stormy,—so that the ship's crew were too busy to take much notice of the children they had picked up, for they had to

attend to their own vessel, which was driven out of her course by the wind.

Fanny kept very quiet in the captain's cabin, and gave no trouble to any one; but Dod and Frank tried to help, and Dod really did make himself useful, though Master Frank was perhaps more in the way than anything else; but the sailors were all very kind, and no one found fault with him.

At last the wind went down, the rain ceased, and the sun shone out once more, and then the captain had a little time to give to his guests.

He was a very kind man, but he quite hurt Frank's feelings by roaring with laughter when he heard the boy's story.

'I can't help laughing; it's such a good joke!' he cried; 'but I like you for your pluck, my boy. You'll be a fine fellow one of these days, that you will, and make your father proud of you. By the by, what did you say was your father's name?'

'Captain Hardy,' said Frank; 'he is gone to find a passage to the North Pole. Perhaps you have heard of him?'

'Heard of him? I should think I had! Not a British sailor but what's heard of Captain Hardy. So you are his son, are you? no wonder there's something in you.'

Frank was quite pleased at this remark, and told the captain all about himself and his father.

'And how did you and this little lassie come to be in this part of the world?' asked the captain.

'We have been staying with our uncle, Mr. Skene of Sweetwells, since our father started on his voyage,' said Frank. 'Perhaps you know my uncle?'

'Yes, I know him by name well enough, and glad I am that I can send you back safe to him. Don't you think he will wonder what has become of you?'

'Oh no!' said Frank; 'we sent a letter in a bottle to say where we had gone.'

At this the captain laughed more than ever. Then he turned quite grave, and walked up and down the deck, rubbing his head till his hair all stood on end.

'Well,' he said at last, standing still before Frank and Fanny, and looking at them with his rough head all on one side, 'I must land you two youngsters at the nearest port,—that's as clear as daylight,—and send you off post-haste to your uncle, for I suppose they've given you up for lost long before this. Let me see; why, it must be a week since you started on your voyage to the North Pole—eh?'

So the kind captain put his vessel again out of her course that he might land these strange children at the nearest port. He went ashore with them and the 'Pixy' himself, and took them to an hotel, 'to be left till called for,' he told the landlord; then he sent a message to Mr. Skene at Sweetwells, and went

back to his own ship, taking care to supply them with money before he said good-bye.

'Tell your father that Skipper Jack of the "Stormy Petrel" was proud to do a good turn to the children of such a man,' said the good, rough fellow, when Frank tried to thank him for all his kindness.

The landlord of the inn, to whom Captain Jack had told the children's story, was so much afraid that they would run away again, that, very much to Frank's disgust, he kept them under lock and key, and would not even allow them to go out of the house. Except for this he treated them very kindly, and loaded them with all sorts of good things to eat. But all the good things would not console Frank for being kept in prison, as he called it. He could not feel at all like a hero after being picked up at sea, and then locked up in the parlour of a little inn. He had looked forward to returning home with glory, bringing his father with him. This was not at all the sort of wind-up to his voyage to suit his pride.

But Fanny and Dod were glad enough to be safe on shore once more, even though they were locked up, and they found plenty to amuse them in looking out of the window and watching the fishing-boats in the little harbour, and Dod was quite happy when he saw that his one earthly treasure, the 'Pixy,' was safely landed on the beach just in front of the inn.

After a time Frank grew tired of sulking and

grumbling, and joined the others at the window. They were all three looking out, and Master Frank was planning an escape from his prison, when a carriage drawn by two horses came dashing up to the inn door. The window was too high up for the children to see who got out of the carriage, but they heard loud voices in the hall, and feet on the stairs, which stopped outside the door of their prison; then the key was turned in the lock, the door was thrown open, and in walked—

But we must now see what had been doing at Sweetwells.





CHAPTER XVII.

SADNESS AND GLADNESS.

HOW soon gladness may be turned to sadness ! Mr. and Mrs. Skene had felt so happy on that bright summer morning as they sat down to breakfast, for their dear little daughter May was so much better that she had nothing to do now but get strong and fat, and the house had to be cleansed, and then in a few days Frank and Fanny could safely return to Sweetwells.

They were talking over this, and the best way of getting the house quite free of the fever, when Jane came in with a letter. Mrs. Skene gave a little cry of joy when she saw the letter. It bore a foreign post-mark, and she knew the handwriting well, for it was that of her brother-in-law, Captain Hardy. She had been longing for this letter for many months, and lately she had fretted a good deal because it had not come ; and she, like Frank and Fanny, had begun to fear that some mishap had come to the

Captain, and that perhaps he had been lost in the ice like so many other brave British sailors who risked their lives for the good of their fellow-men.

But Mrs. Skene had never spoken of her fears to the children ; she did not wish to cause them grief or pain unless there were real need for it. And now the long looked-for letter had come at last. Captain Hardy wrote to say that the perils of the Arctic Seas were past, and that he hoped to follow his letter very shortly to Sweetwells.

‘That is nice,’ said Mr. Skene. ‘You must make haste and clean your house, my dear, and then we can welcome the children and their father at the same time. Suppose we keep it a little secret from the children, and give them a pleasant surprise.’

No sooner had he said these words, than Eppie’s ring was heard ; and we know what news she brought, and how the missing children were sought for in vain on sea and land.

That was an awful week, as day after day went by without any news of the lost ones, and, as the wind blew a gale, both Mr. and Mrs. Skene began to lose all hope ; and as for poor old Eppie, she made herself quite ill, and said she could never forgive herself as long as she lived for not taking better care of the bairns that had been given to her charge, and it seemed likely to be the death of the poor woman herself.

Now Mrs. Skene dreaded the very sight of a letter from Captain Hardy. How could she ever face him with the news that his children were lost. So a whole week went by, how they hardly knew, and all the faces about Sweetwells grew more and more gloomy. One morning, just as Mr. Skene was starting off to renew his almost hopeless search, Jane came in, holding two yellow letters in her hand.

'Here's a boy come running all the way from the post office, and he wants sixpence for each of these letters,' she said. 'Oh, please, sir, is there any news?'

Mr. Skene took the yellow letters and tore them open; the first one was a short message from Captain Hardy, saying that he was just starting in the train for Sweetwells, and would arrive in a few hours. When Mrs. Skene read this message she almost fainted away. But the second soon brought her back to life; it was from Andrew Jack, of the 'Stormy Petrel,' saying that he had picked up Captain Hardy's children in an open boat, and left them all safe and sound in charge of the landlord of the inn at Portsoy.

Oh, the joy and the laughter and the bustle after this! Servants were flying all over the place with the glad news. The stable-boy hoisted a flag on the roof of the byres, and for the time they all seemed almost mad with delight.

In the midst of it all, up drove Captain Hardy,

for his message had not come so quickly as it ought.

He looked round him with surprise at not seeing his own children there to welcome him ; and then he had to be told the strange tale of how they had been lost and found.

‘I will be off at once to Portsoy, to make sure that they are my children,’ he said.

‘I was just going to start for them myself,’ said Mr. Skene ; ‘the carriage is now getting ready.’

‘There will be time for you to eat something before you start,’ said Mrs. Skene, who had hardly been able to welcome the Captain yet.

‘Well, I’ll just take a snack,’ said Captain Hardy, ‘while the horses are being put in.’

He was at the table, eating his hurried meal, when who should come in but old Eppie. She had heard the good news, and could not keep away from Sweetwells ; and besides, she too had something to tell.

She had a bottle in her hand which had been picked up in the sea by one of the fishermen of the village, and brought to her, for inside the bottle was a letter for old Eppie herself.

Mrs. Skene read the letter and handed it to the Captain ; he read these words : ‘We are gone to the North Pole to look for papa. We shall be back soon and bring him with us.’ And the brave weather-beaten sailor, who did not know what fear was,

turned away his head and rubbed the tears out of his eyes.

‘God bless the dear children, and make me worthy of such love,’ he said, in a choking voice. ‘And they shall come back, and bring me with them after all.’

Captain Hardy and Mr. Skene were soon going full speed along the road to Portsoy, which was about ten miles from Sweetwells.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A JOYFUL FEAST.



NOW we know who it was that came in to release the children from their prison. First, Mr. Skene, and then—could it be true?—Captain Hardy himself!

Fanny gave a cry of joy, and rushed into her father's arms, and clung round his neck, and was ready to smother him

with kisses.

He kissed her again and again, and then held her at arms' length, and had a good look at her with his kind eyes.

'Yes, it is just the same little girl, my own little girl that I left behind me, only a little bit taller,' he

said, as he stroked her head; 'and this is my boy Frank too, just the same Frank as of old, always famous for getting into scrapes.'

When the horses were fed and rested, the whole party started for Sweetwells.

It was hard work to persuade Dod to go and leave his dear 'Pixy' behind him, but Mr. Skene gave orders that the 'Pixy' was to be sent on in a long cart the very next day, and at last daft Dod did consent to jump on the box beside the coachman.

Captain Hardy kept Fanny on his knee all the way home. He seemed half afraid that she would slip away again; and he made Frank give a full account of their voyage in the 'Pixy.'

'It was great fun,' said Frank, 'if only we hadn't been so thirsty. The next time I go on a voyage, I will make sure of a good supply of fresh water, I know that. That Skipper Jack was a good enough sort of fellow if he hadn't treated us like babies. I felt quite angry with him at first, but it's turned out right enough, as you were all safe, papa.'

'I'm afraid if it had not been for Skipper Jack, you would all three have been at the bottom of the sea to-day, Frank,' said Mr. Skene. 'I shall invite him to spend a week at Sweetwells.'

'Yes, do, please, uncle; he is a dear, kind man,' said Fanny.

Captain Hardy spent the rest of the summer at

Sweetwells, where he soon made friends with all the children's pets.

Before winter, he took Frank and Fanny back with him to London. They were very sorry to bid farewell to their kind uncle and aunt and cousins, and to the cattle and horses and fowls; and as long as they lived they never forgot the happy year they spent in bonnie Scotland.



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